

Myth as an Islamic Symbolic Defense: A Historical-Symbolic Study of the Myth of Gong Gerem in Pringsurat Village, Temanggung Regency

Panis Dhbi Salam

UIN Salatiga

dhbisalam@uinsalatiga.ac.id

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Abstract

This research is motivated by intellectual anxiety towards the mainstream understanding of myth studies. Myths have always been understood in terms of education or if not so, then in terms of truth which cannot be trusted scientifically. However, this study will look at the gong gerem myth as a cultural symbolic phenomenon, thus allowing for different interpretation. The method used in this study is the historical method, which includes heuristics, source criticism, interpretation and historiography. The paradigm used is symbolic with the assumption that culture is a symbolic phenomenon, which can be given meaning. The meaning built in this context relates it to the historical and socio-cultural conditions of the supporting community. The results of this study show that the myth of gong gerem in the forms of *wewaler* (prohibition) and *balak* (disaster) contains Islamic symbolic messages for the Ngloho and Bleder people. *Wewaler* that contains a prohibition against people not performing arts using a gong because it can cause floods, contains a message that they are not allowed to engage in the art of *jogedan* because they are considered to distract people from God. However, when this type of art finally became available in that place, disaster (read *balak*) is believed to have come in the form of the breakdown of the santri's moral order. Therefore, the myth of gong gerem in the form of *wewaler* and *balak* is basically a symbolic defense of Islamic society.

Keywords: the myth of gong gerem, the art of *jogedan*, santri morality arrangement

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kegelisahan intelektual terhadap pemahaman mainstream tentang kajian mitos. Mitos selama ini selalu dipahami dari segi pendidikan ataupun kalau tidak demikian, maka dari segi kebenaran yang tidak dapat dipercaya secara ilmiah. Namun, kajian ini akan melihat mitos gong gerem sebagai fenomena simbolik kebudayaan, sehingga memungkinkan bagi munculnya penafsiran berbeda. Metode yang digunakan dalam kajian ini, yaitu historis, yang meliputi kegiatan heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi dan historiografi. Adapun paradigma yang digunakan, yaitu simbolik dengan anggapan bahwa

kebudayaan adalah fenomena simbol, yang dapat diberikan makna atasnya. Pemaknaan yang dibangun dalam konteks ini dengan cara merelasikan terhadap kondisi historis dan sosial budaya masyarakat pendukungnya. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan, mitos gong gerem dalam bentuk *wewaler* (larangan) dan *balak* (bencana) sebenarnya memuat pesan simbolik keislaman bagi masyarakat Ngloho dan Bleder. *Wewaler* yang berisi larangan terhadap masyarakat untuk tidak berkesenian yang menggunakan gong karena dapat mendatangkan *balak* air bah, tidak lain berisi pesan tidak diperbolehkannya mereka untuk berkesenian *jogedan* karena dianggap dapat mengalihkan perhatian manusia dari Allah. Namun, ketika jenis seni ini akhirnya ada di tempat tersebut, bencana (baca *balak*) diyakini datang dalam bentuk rusaknya tatanan moralitas santri. Oleh sebab itu, mitos gong gerem dalam bentuk *wewaler* dan *balak* pada dasarnya adalah sebuah pertahanan simbolik keislaman masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: *mitos gong gerem, seni jogedan, tatanan moralitas sant*

INTRODUCTION

The gong gerem myth is a mystical narrative supported by the Bleder and Ngloho villagers in Pringsurat Village, Temanggung Regency, Central Java Province. It is related to the emergence of Blumbang Bleder, a natural pond located in Bleder hamlet. The myth tells that there was once a large water spring in this place that could cause a flood. The ancestors did *tirakat* (a mystical contemplation) to connect with *Sing Bahurekso* (the supernatural ruler of the place) to overcome the problem. The problem was solved by covering the spring with a *gong*, called ‘gong gerem’. However, the villagers were warned not to organize or perform traditional arts using gongs or any similar equipment, since the gong gerem could break down and a flood would follow. Finally, the blockage was made; the giant spring was stopped, leaving only small seeps that later formed a natural pool.

In substance, the myth contains two elements: *wewaler* (prohibition) and *balak* (disaster). The former refers to the disallowance of gong-based art, while the latter arises as a flooding disaster if the violation is committed. Yet even though the myth is just folklore for generations, the two hamlets do not dare to host or organize art performances (except in the case of *kubrosiswo*, further discussed) using the gong or related musical instruments.

The study of the gong gerem myth is yet to be undertaken, but M. Idfakul Yusak once undertook a similar study on the *wewaler* of puppetry in Nganjuk. It is a myth prohibiting Ngrogot villagers from organizing puppet shows as they can bring disaster. He believes that

it serves an educational religious function, based on the belief that there are supernatural forces influencing human beings, and obeying them brings good for the community.¹

Like the study conducted by M. Idfakul Yusak, the study of myths mostly focuses on the functional paradigm, resulting in the educational function issue.² Furthermore, some argue about the validity of the information within the myth.³ Instead, this study examines the gong gerem myth as a symbolic cultural phenomenon, in which a symbolic historical approach is applied in analyzing it, providing different interpretations. Understanding the historical and socio-cultural context of the supporting society is necessary, as myths are essentially a reflection of the culture of the society.

The supporters of the gong gerem myth are people with santri cultural roots - using Clifford Geertz's term, a variant of Javanese religion, where people tend to be obedient in carrying out Islamic religious obligations.⁴ In addition, the Ngloho and Bleder are farmers who cultivate cultural aspects based on agricultural issues. Meanwhile, the spirituality of this people was formed from a historical process that occurred since the early 20th century and strengthened along with the emergence of Islamic identity sentiment in the 1950s-1960s, as well as the raging politics of the era. Therefore, the symbolic historical understanding of the gong gerem myth is correlated within the core context of the peasant-santri culture, hence the research question answered in this study, 'what is the symbolic meaning of the gong gerem myth in the socio-cultural context of its supporting community?'.

¹ M. Idfakul Zusak, "Mitos Seni Wayang Desa Kelutan Kecamatan Ngronggot Kabupaten Nganjuk," *Jurnal Simki Pedagogia* 02, no. No. 4 (2018), <http://simki.unpkediri.ac.id/detail/13.1.01.07.0083>.

² See: Nidya T. Patricia, "Nilai-nilai Didaktis dalam Cerita Rakyat, Putri Gumbili dengan Bambang Haruman," *Undas* 15, no. 1 (Juni 2019): pp. 19-32; Mukaramah, "Nilai Pendidikan Karakter dalam Cerita Rakyat Legenda Sawerigading" (Skripsi, Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, 2018); Fitriani, "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Dalam Kumpulan Mitos Dan Legenda Sulawesi Selatan" (Skripsi, Universitas Negeri Makasar, 2016), <http://eprints.unm.ac.id/5290/>. These studies, while having different objects of study, revolve around the same thing: education and morals.

³ In social humanities disciplines, especially history, colonial historians such as Mr J.A. van der Chijs, Mr P.C. Bloys van Treslong and Ds. J. Mooij Prins refused the traditional (read mythical) type of historiography, as its accuracy was considered scientifically unaccountable. See: Abdul Syukur, "Historiografi Belandasesentris," *Jurnal Sejarah Lontar* 7, no. 2 (2010): 41-49, <https://doi.org/10.21009/LONTAR.072.04>

⁴ The concept of santri here is seen in Clifford Geertz's conceptual definition as a group of Islamic people who are devout in religion, fulfil their obligations and are in a firm Islamic faith. See: Clifford Geertz, *Abangan, Santri, Priyayi dalam Masyarakat Jawa*, diterjemahkan oleh Aswab Mahasin, dkk. (Jakarta: PT Midas Surya Grafindo, 1989).

METHODOLOGY

This research uses the symbolic paradigm of culture. As Ernest Cassirer points out, humans are symbolic creatures, so their cultural products are basically a matter of symbols.⁵ As a symbol system, it is the life text of relationships and meaning.⁶ This view consequently leads to an understanding of the existence of a sign system consisting of a signifier and a signified. The signifier is the representational medium that humans create to organize the world into language, while the sign is the image or idea that is manifested into the signifier. Ahimsa Putra believes that both relations are arbitrary and more interestingly, signs are created due to the captured binary opposition of reality.⁷ Therefore, symbolic meaning can be constructed once it is related to other texts in the culture. Thus, contextual placement in historical and cultural space is applied in this article to give meaning to the gong gerem myth.

This study applies the historical research method, consisting of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation and historiography. Since the object of this study is a cultural phenomenon, data collection was conducted by means of literature studies and interviews. The latter was chosen as an oral history strategy, in which written sources are difficult to obtain at the site of study. In the following step, source criticism is carried out by cross-checking one source with another, as well as analyzing the relationships that occur, to form a wholeness of meaning. The last step is presentation in written form.

DISCUSSION

The Culture of Farmer-Muslims: The Historical-Cultural Origins of the Ngloho and Bleder Peoples

The Geocultural of Ngloho and Bleder Peoples

As a human creation, culture is developed in a historical process of human interaction with their environment. One of the factors is the geographical conditions that determine the cultural style of a society. The Ngloho and Bleder villages, in the context of Java in general, are a type of farmer culture. The farmers are specifically moorland or dryland farmers. The

⁵ See: Ernst Cassirer, *Manusia dan Kebudayaan: Sebuah Esai Tentang Manusia*, diterjemahkan oleh Alois A. Nugroho (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1987).

⁶ See: Heddy Shri Ahimsa Putra, *Strukturalisme Levi Strauss: Mitos dan Karya Sastra* (Yogyakarta: Kepel Press, 2006), pp. 35–37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, hlm. 37.

geographical conditions of the two places are in a hilly valley and part of the central mountain range in Java's inland. Several nearby mountains, namely Mount Merapi, Mount Merbabu, Mount Andong, Mount Telomoyo, Mount Ungaran, Mount Sindoro and Mount Sumbing encircle the village from all sides. Mount Merapi is very active, with frequent periodic eruptions of no more than a decade, the volcanic ash reaching both villages and resulting in high soil fertility.

The condition in the hilly valley makes Ngloho and Bleder abundant in springs, the water of which flows into the Murung River along the village from east to west. Villagers' houses are densely clustered to the north of the river in a terraced pattern on the slopes of Pendem Hill. On the east side of this hill lies another hill, Mbulu Hill, bordering Duwok Hamlet to the east. Meanwhile, to the north of these two villages is another village that the Ngloho and Bleder people call *lor-loran* (north side) and whose inhabitants are often referred to as *wong lor-loran* (people of the north side). To the south of the Murung River lies Papringan Hill and directly opposite Krajan Hamlet - an open spot on the Yogyakarta-Semarang highway, where the capital of Pringsurat Sub-district is located. Ngloho and Bleder overlap, located in the east and west respectively, and are bordered by Blumbang Bleder.

Ngloho and Bleder's location in the mountains and rich in springs allowed for the emergence of a culture of moorland farmers. Moorlands have long been the economic pillar of the community's farming economy, dominating their economic activities. This dominance, however, is an ecological adaptation to the geographical conditions of the place where they live, which is mountainous and impossible to develop large rice fields like places with flat topography.

According to verbal sources, at least in the 1950s, along the banks of the Murung River in the Ngloho and Bleder areas, rice fields were once established that utilized irrigation from the many springs that had sprung up in the vicinity. These fields have regular irrigation, but the swampy and muddy soil is quite forced and unfit for management. In some places, the depth of the mud is unknown, so planting, weeding, piling and so on must be done using rafts of planks. Similarly, the size of this paddy field cannot be imagined as a stretch of rice fields in other areas, 'as far as the eye can see'. This place is just a narrow space close to the Murung River, so the harvest is only for subsistence, not necessarily enough food for the next harvest. Hence, the villagers optimized the moorland on the surrounding hills.

Before the 1990s, food crops developed on Ngloho and Bleder moorlands included cassava and corn. These were cultivated on the slopes of the hills. Corn was the main food staple at that time. Cassava, taro, and other roots became complementary foods. Following Indonesia's self-sufficiency in rice in the mid-1980s and the land began to run out due to inheritance, people slowly began to replace their main staple food with rice.

Kepercayaan Lokal

The complex relationship between humans and the land not only produces material culture, but also immaterial culture, especially local beliefs in places considered sacred in Ngloho and Bleder. The form is animistic and dynamistic beliefs attached to moorlands and water springs. However, these two things are the main foundation of the community's existence. Anything considered to bring prosperity in the broadest sense, it is well known, gets cultist. This worship is often known as the cult of fertility.

The community's belief in sacred places is manifested in faith in the *danyang* or *Sing Bahurekso*, a supernatural entity regarded as the ruler of a particular place and a major influence on the people's happiness or disaster. Some *danyang* considered ever 'existed' by the community, such as *Ulo Kendang* ruling the *Ngasinan* spring on the slopes of Mbulu Hill; Nyai Protro and Kyai Potro ruling the *Mbulu* spring; the giant squirrel demon ruling *Tegal Megatan*; Nyai Cepur and Kyai Cepur ruling the spring on the slopes of Papringan Hill; as well as *Ulo Kendang*, *Angsa Emas*, *Inten Pitu*, and so on are believed to be the rulers of *Blumbang Bleder*. In old days, of course, they were regarded as local 'gods' and mystical sources of happiness, which gave them a spiritually positive meaning, thus deserving of offerings of agricultural products in the form of offerings and rituals and were determinants of natural fertility (land) and the blessing of life.

A ritual that is closely related to soil fertility and which still exists until this research was conducted is *sadranan* - a form of gratitude to the supernatural for the abundance of natural resources. While this ritual was performed by each village in Pringsurat Village, prior to the 1960s, Ngloho and Bleder residents performed it collectively at Blumbang Bleder with residents of Duwok and Mirikerep. It is unclear how the *ijab* (ritual verbal intention) in *pemetrian* (offering) was performed at that time, whether Islamic or Javanese. However, the *ubo rampe* ('offerings') typically used as *pemetrian danyang* were still found, such as *ingkung ayam* and *tumpeng*. Unless the *ubo rampe* is indeed for *pemetrian* purposes, it might

be that the *sadranan* is also used as a ritual offering to *danyang*. After the 1960s this collective *sadranan* ended, which may have been influenced by the increase in villagers becoming Muslims. In Ngloho and Bleder, this ritual was then performed independently with the core of Islamic prayer in the form of *tahlilan*⁸, which in turn changed its spiritual meaning as an act that no longer made offerings to *danyang*, but as an activity of praying to God for the ancestors.⁹

As Islam becomes stronger, the belief in *danyang* shifts in meaning. Islam reframed this concept of belief in a new light. As a monotheistic teaching, it is known that the *prima causa* of life is Allah. All creatures in this world are His creations and are subordinated to Him. This includes the *danyang*, *Sing Bahurekso* or whatever it is called, which then undergoes Islamisation in the understanding of Islamic intellectualism. The concepts of jinn, satan and the devil, interestingly, become the Islamic conceptual framework for identifying the *danyang* with these labels. Hence, they then identify with, ‘things that mislead, turn away devotion to Allah, things that lead away from Islam's truth, leaders of evil and disbelief and so on’.¹⁰ This means that the *danyang* or *Sing Bahurekso* no longer has the authority to determine life, as it has been taken over by the One God as the *prima causa*. The positive meaning of the local supernatural entity is lost and reduced to a negative understanding that is considered to bring badness and disaster.

In Ngloho and Bleder, where people are Muslims, the understanding of *danyang* is strongly influenced by Islamic monotheism. The belief in the existence of *danyang* is still present, but offerings to them are not found in this community. In addition, this view also results in their view of the surrounding nature, especially sacred places (read: *danyang's* residence) which tend to be avoided and feared due to their belief in their negative influence. The sacred place and the *danyang* are no longer a mystical source of happiness.

⁸ Tahlilan is a ritual activity found in many santri groups. The essence of this activity is the recitation of *ṭayyibah*, seperti *Lailaha Illallah*, *Astaghfirullah*, *Subhanallah* and so on. However, the most important thing in this activity is the form of prayer requests to Allah (God) addressed to the dead and the living to get forgiveness, safety and blessings. In this context, Allah is placed at the centre of faith as the determinant of all life.

⁹ See: Setiorini Rahma Safitri, “Apresiasi Masyarakat Santri Ngloho terhadap Kesenian Kubrosiswo Bintang Mudo di Ngloho Pringsurat Temanggung” (Tesis, Semarang, Universitas Negeri Semarang, 2017).

¹⁰ See: Farid Hasan, *Makna Ayat-ayat Al-Quran dalam Fenomena Penyembuhan Kesurupan: Studi Living Qur’an pada Kesenian Kubrosiswo Bintang Mudo di Pringsurat Temanggung* (Salatiga: LP2M IAIN Salatiga, 2020), p. 62-63.

Another explanation is related to Islam's prohibition of *syirik*. Disbelief in Allah is the most sinful act in Islam. The elaboration of this is realized in various prohibitions, such as equating, worshipping, associating, asking for help, requesting or praying to something that is not Allah. The prohibition on strengthening changes in human attitudes and views in dealing with nature with all its metaphysical aspects. The idea of monotheism not only changes the understanding of *sadranan's* meaning, but also of various other religious rituals in both communities, where even though the form of locality (read: *kejawaan*) is maintained, the core beliefs are prayers in the frame of Islamic monotheism.¹¹

The Formation of Santri Identity

The Ngloho and Bleder villagers are biologically genealogical, believing that they come from different ancestors. However, historically and culturally there are strong points of intersection building common traditions and identities. Both use the same facilities for places of worship and funerals. For example, Friday prayers are performed together at the Arrahman Mosque in Bleder. The Imam also takes turns praying between the two. They also share the same burial place, the Ngenthak cemetery, where when a death occurs, they work together (if a Bleder person dies, the Ngloho person digs the grave and vice versa). In addition, for a long time they also shared the *nggon ngaji*¹², where Ngloho children could go to Bleder and vice versa. Even in the past, when compared to other villages in the Pringsurat region, these two villages were often labelled as 'the face of the santri of Pringsurat village' due to their strong Islamic traditions. Aside from the ancestral differences, these similarities lead to the unarguable understanding that, in Islamic context, Ngloho's history is Bleder's history, and Bleder's history is Ngloho's history. The question is, when did they have the same historical intersection, which eventually built a commonality as a santri tradition.

Based on oral histories, the people of Ngloho and Bleder have been developing Islamic traditions since the early twentieth century. A seventy-nine-year-old resident from Bleder once told the researcher that the oldest *mushala* in his village had existed since he was a

¹¹ The Ngloho and Bleder communities, as elsewhere in Java, still perform annual village rituals (*kejawaan* rituals) based on the Javanese calendar, such as *saparan*, *muludan*, *sadranan* and so on. However, almost all of the main prayers used are tahlilan. Regarding the various forms of rituals in this society and the changes in the meaning of these Javanese rituals due to the influence of Islamic teachings can be seen in: Setiorini Rahma Safitri, *op.cit.*, pp. 91-99.

¹² *Nggon ngaji* is a religious study place. It is usually conducted in the kyai's houses or people who are considered to be masters of religious knowledge. It is usually for children and offers basic Islamic knowledge, such as reading and writing the Hijaiyah letters, teaching prayer, fasting and so on.

child, established by his grandfather in the yard of his house. The same is also found in Ngloho. Another sixty-five-year-old villager of this village also said that in his village there was once an old *mushala* that his grandfather had built in the yard of his house. When his father was still alive, his father also used to be the priest of the mosque.

This man happened to be a newcomer. It was unclear what year he came, but it was known to be from the beginning of his marriage. The informant mentioned that the father who was the imam of the *mushala* was the second son of the grandfather and was born in 1912. This means that the grandfather came to Ngloho probably before that year. It is certain that his initiative to establish the *mushala* was most likely in the early decades of the twentieth century, because by 1951 he had died.¹³

The informant's statement was also confirmed by another informant who claimed to have been born in 1925.¹⁴ Upon being asked about the history of the man above, he explained that he was indeed a newcomer. He also did not know when the man came to Ngloho, as he had lived there since he was a child. However, in relation to the initiation of Islamization of his village in the early decades of the twentieth century, he reinforced the first informant by saying that his village had embraced Islam since he was a child.

In the following period, around the adulthood of people born between the 1900s and the 1930s, Ngloho and Bleder were full of Islamic activities, from recitations, *sowan*¹⁵ *kyai*, and *santri kalong*¹⁶, who went back and forth to study with *kyai* who were considered charismatic in the surrounding *pesantren*. Inviting *kyai* to give religious lectures is a common practice. Also, *sowan* and *santri kalong* activities to *kyai* who are considered *wali*¹⁷, such as Kyai Siraj from Payaman Magelang, Kyai Hasan Mangli from Grabag Magelang and

¹³ Despite this doubt, according to a source from Ngloho who was born in 1932, the *mushalla* was established in 1937. This doubt is certainly because the source cannot be considered credible as a witness to history because he was still a child at that time.

¹⁴ The information about the informant's year of birth, 1925, can more or less be accounted for, because during the Indonesian Independence Revolution he had already taken up arms against the Dutch who came at that time. It is highly unlikely that this person was a child when he fought against the Dutch. He must have been at least 15 or 20 years old.

¹⁵ *Sowan* is a Javanese term for a visit to someone who is considered to have a high social status or is respected.

¹⁶ *Santri kalong* is a term for students who do not live in the boarding school. They study religion by travelling back and forth at certain times to the *pesantren*.

¹⁷ The term *wali* in the *santri* group is defined as people who are close to God because of their good quality of worship. They are considered as people who are able to channel God's blessings, so they are highly respected and often asked for advice to solve the problems of community life.

Kyai Dalhar from Watu Congol Magelang become daily activities of the community to improve their understanding of Islam and get advice for solving life problems.

The Ngloho and Bleder communities' religious learning activities or *mondok*¹⁸ in pesantren began around the 1940s. This is due to several generations born in the 1930s, who were already boarding school students. In the 1940s, they were already in their teens and thus the right time for them to take the Quran seriously. Since then, and over the next few decades, many children from both places were sent to pesantren in Java. Some were in neighbouring areas, such as Magelang and Salatiga, but others went to Kali Wungu (Kendal), Banten and Jember.

Pesantren is the main educational preference for this people. After returning from pesantren, most of them set up *nggon ngaji* in their homes, becoming kyai kampung, imam of mosque, imam of mushala and religious figure. Until the 2000s, this practice was interrupted as few Ngloho and Bleder children wanted to go to boarding school as their parents had done. They prefer formal education that provides a degree and is considered more likely to fulfil their expectations for an easier job search in the future. However, the culture is actually deeply rooted, bringing Islam not just as knowledge, but as a *weltanschauung*, a way of life for the society in seeing, understanding and responding to the world it encounters.

The increasing Islamization of the Ngloho and Bleder peoples was also influenced by the political history of Indonesia. The independence revolution period up to the 1960s was crucial for them in shaping their identity amidst the diversity and political sectarianism that prevailed at that time. From the very early days of independence some Ngloho people joined the Laskar Hizbullah - a fighting army that was formed during the Japanese occupation and participated in the defence of independence against the invaders. Being an Islamic group, they were supporters of the Masyumi party. When the Nahdlatul Ulama party was established in 1952, they moved to this party in large numbers and voted in the 1955 elections.

During this era, the political conditions were full of ideological battles between parties which dragged the Ngloho and Bleder people into the national currents. As santri, they were called upon to identify themselves as an Islamic group, especially when they had to deal with communism at that time. In 1955, in Temanggung, the election won by the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) created unrest not only at the elite level, but also at the lowest level of

¹⁸ *Mondok* refers to learning religion by staying in a boarding school.

society.¹⁹ As the public feared, Ngloho and Bleder were immersed in the national issue that ‘Indonesia might be ruled by communists, where religious understanding would have no place’.

The threat of communism was increasingly apparent when they had to confront the surrounding community, i.e., the *lor-loran* area (northern areas), where many of the residents were sympathizers of this ideology. Due to the pressure of the situation, there was internal consolidation, both sociological and cultural, which resulted in a strong bond between Ngloho and Bleder as a representation of the *santri* group vis a vis those who were considered different. The latter were *abangan* groups associated with the practice of local beliefs (read animism and dynamism), thus reinforcing social segregation. Simultaneously, negative labels were created that served to intensify the divisions, such as *wong lor-loran* (people of lor-loran), *abangan*, *ora Islam* (un-Islamic) and so on. This attitude not only distanced them from each other, but also from the brotherhood relations among them, until the reformation in 1998, when the anti-communist issue began to break down, thawed and reconciled this tension.²⁰

The idea of the Jogedan Dance

The strong cultural conflict between the Ngloho-Bleder people and the *lor-loran* people extends beyond politics and beliefs and is also manifested in their views on art. Whether it began when it did, but it probably dates to the 1950s, Ngloho and Bleder share a traditional Islamic art form called *manoro*. It is similar to hadrah music using arabic instruments such as flutes and singing Islamic hymns with Javanese melodies and vocal scales.

There are two *manoro* groups in Ngloho and Bleder. The first group is for Ngloho people only, while the second group is a combination of both artists. Moreover, while the first group is professional and receives a lot of external feedback, the second group is more of an aesthetic outlet.

The performance was framed in a sense of *adab* (Islamic ethics), i.e. it was performed sitting down. There were musicians and singers. The musician accompanied the singer in

¹⁹ Lihat: Wakhidah Khikmawati, “Rekonsiliasi Kultural Eks-Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) dengan Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Tahun 1966-2006 di Temanggung (Skripsi, IAIN Salatiga, 2019), p. 32.

²⁰ Related to the anti-communist issue and the public reconciliation of hostility to those who were considered to have ‘once’ practised communism after the 1998 Reformation, can be seen in: Budiawan, *Mematahkan Pewarisan Ingatan: Wacana Anti-Komunis dan Politik Rekonsiliasi Pasca-Soeharto* (Jakarta: ELSAM, 2004).

singing Islamic hymns. It is performed by men - no women, dressed in the 'Islamic' style, i.e. with a sarong, a cap and a shirt or suit. There are no dance moves - as their understanding of Islamic manners is that politeness is in quietness, in prayer, in sitting, with only hands playing instruments and mouths singing. This art form survived until the mid-1990s, before being replaced by another art form, *kubrosiswo*.

In contrast to Ngloho and Bleder, which developed Islamic traditional arts in their understanding towards civilisation, the lor-loran developed many Javanese traditional dance arts, such as *kuda lumping*, *soreng*, *ndhengthek*, *prajuritan*, *warok* and other similar arts. These arts were mostly performed with traditional Javanese instruments, such as *gong*, *bendhe* (a small gong), *saron*, *bonang*, *kendang* and *jedor* (a bass drum) to accompany the dancers' movements. Some included vocal chants in dynamic beats that evoke the emotion of the performance. The attire was also uniquely Javanese, with the use of masks, *blangkon*, headbands, *barongan*, *kuda keping*, whips and so on. In each performance, there was usually a possessed session.

Examining the two types of art above shows a difference in identity. *Manoro* was strongly influenced by Arabic culture, while the art of the *lor-loran* people represented Javanese locality. The only intra-aesthetic similarity was the vocal melody range, which was also Javanese. Beyond that, the 'behaviour' of the art showed a different level of civility, between those who sit and those who dance; between those who sing Islamic praise and those with dynamic-emotive vocals; between those with Arabic (read Islamic) instruments and Javanese instruments; and between those without possessed and those with possessed. This then led to social identity problems in defining between those who were 'santri' and those who were 'not santri'.

In the Ngloho and Bleder communities' vision, civilized art is something that lies within the boundaries of manoro's cultural imagination. When manoro was defined as an Islamic art form, the traditional lor-loran dance form was diametrically opposed. The existence of manoro reflected *santri* culture, while traditional Javanese dance was endorsed by people who had been defined as *abangan*. The manoro's Islamic praise was meant to be an affirmative expression of Islamic beliefs, while the other was understood in terms of other faiths. The manoro was done politely by sitting, while the other was done by dancing (read not in peace). Hence the term *jogedan* art - a label for traditional dance art belonging to the lor-loran people as a marker of art that was not within the boundaries of Islamic manners,

but an aesthetic representation of belonging to other groups. It was identical to the *abangan* culture and became an unimaginable discourse.

The Paradox of Islamic Identity in Kubrosiswo Bintang Mudo Dance Art

As manoro's existence faded, a traditional dance art form, *kubrosiswo*, was formed in Ngloho in 1989. It was strongly supported by young men from both Ngloho and Bleder who felt that their aesthetic channels were missing. Manoro no longer has any interest, leaving only the elderly as supporters. The youth's preferences shifted towards energetic and dynamic art as the influence of Javanese traditional dance flourished in the neighborhood during those years.

Kubrosiswo is derived from the words 'kubro' and 'siswo', which mean 'big' and 'disciple' respectively, often interpreted as a student upholding the greatness of God. Another version says the art comes from the acronym, 'ubahing badan lan raga', or 'physical and mental movement', implying the harmonization of the worldly and afterlife aspects.²¹ According to Machmoed Effendhie, this art first emerged in Mendut Magelang around the 1960s. It was initiated by a group of *santri* (Islamic students) to gather the youth to prevent them from becoming involved in communism. Originally a martial art, it evolved into movement and dance.²² Afterwards, the art gradually expanded to nearby areas, such as Yogyakarta, Magelang and Temanggung.²³

From an intra-aesthetic perspective, *kubrosiswo* is a type of dance. Dance and music are the primary components of it. Specifically, it is a dance accompanied by music. The music is in 4/4 rhythm, sung using Javanese instruments: *jedor*, *bendhe* and *kendang*. No melodic elements were found in the instruments. The melodic element was only in vocal melodies, which were all on the diatonic scale. The dance movements were mimics of warfare, military and peasant labour. The dance type varied with each song. Some were energetic, particularly during the marching sessions, and were quite gentle during the *rodat* sessions. Between these sessions, performers were usually in a possessed state, an anomaly in the show's normal plot of opening march - *rodat* - closing march. When this occurs, the

²¹ Jihan Burhanudin, "Identitas Kesenian Tradisional Kubro Siswo di Dusun Sedayu II, Sedayu, Muntilan, Magelang (Skripsi, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, 2016), hlm. 2.

²² Machmoed Effendhie, "Unsur Budaya Santri dalam Seni: Studi Pendahuluan tentang Seni Pertunjukan Rakyat Kobra Siswa di Magelang" (Laporan Penelitian, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2001), hlm. 15-16.

²³ In the 1970s, a Ngloho local source said that this art form had appeared in the Pringsurat sub-district of Soborejo village.

dancers who were not in possession withdraw and return backstage accompanied by the closing march.

The strong connection between *kubrosiswo* and Islamic identity, aside from its history and name, lied in its instar esthetic aspect. Many theme songs employ *da'wah*-themed verses, such as invitations to worship, five-time prayers, Quran recitation commands, and information about the right knowledge in religion. In addition, there was theme music of farmers' lives and nationalism.²⁴ In short, *kubrosiswo* represented the culture of rural Muslim farmers. Even though this is a dance (read '*jogedan*'), this seemed to influence the acceptance of the Ngloho and Bleder communities, as they share a common cultural imagination as Muslim farmers.

Kubrosiswo did not come without polemics in this santri community, particularly regarding the local beliefs that accompanied it. *Kubrosiswo Bintang Mudo*, as the arts in Ngloho were named, contained elements of *Abangan* culture when performed, such as pre-performance rituals, the use of offerings of grave leaves and possession. The pre-performance ritual seeks protection by visiting *Sing Bahurekso* at the ancestor's grave who is considered the village *danyang*. Led by members who are considered to know mystical matters, the *ijab* (verbal ritual intention) begged for protection to make the art performance successful and no disaster would happen to it.

The strongest criticism of this work was the possession issue. This was a common phenomenon found in any traditional art performance in that place. It was not an unusual thing among the Ngloho and Bleder people. However, in the context of art, this was clearly not an ordinary phenomenon, as no precedent existed in their art (read *manoro* art). This form was found in the *jogedan* of the *lor-loran* people regarded as *abangan*.

One Bleder religious figure, also a critic of *kubrosiswo* art, once said that possession in Islamic understanding was *musykil*, which he interpreted as drunkenness or unconsciousness. In the Ngloho and Bleder communities, it was also seen as a unconscious state of being possessed by demons - spiritual beings that in their terminology were seen as carriers of disaster and misguidance. Meanwhile, Javanese concepts often identify it as *ora eling* or a state of not remembering.

In Javanese culture, *eling* (remembering) as against *ora eling* has a central position in human life, as it concerns the spiritual condition of remembering goodness, truth, purity and

²⁴ Sctiorini Rahma Safitri, *op.cit.*, p. 64-66.

God. Islam certainly demands this, as the five prayers, for example, are also interpreted as an act of remembering Allah. Instead, *ora eling* is easily understood as the act of ‘neglecting God’, implying people's distraction to misguidance (read satan).

Ora eling (read possession) is an unintentional behavior within the Islamic culture of Ngloho and Bleder. However, the art that led to possession was understood as a self-purposing act of *ora eling*, which means neglecting God and turning oneself over to the devil. In this manner of thought, then, the issue enters the realm of *aqidah* - the core of their faith. In other words, *kubrosiswo* has penetrated this Islamic culture's core. Therefore, the word *musykil*, as criticized, implies that the art carries an ‘other face’ that is incompatible with the Islamic faith that is their cultural spirit.

Pageblug: the ‘Balak’ Origins of the Gong Gerem Myth

The *Kubrosiswo*'s presence in Ngloho was strongly supported by the young people at the time. However, the Head of Ngloho Hamlet, who was still in his thirties when the art came, once told the researcher that he contributed to initiating it. As the leader he felt the need to facilitate the young people's interest in the art form. So, some coaches were invited from Nipis Village, Grabag, Magelang. The interest was great - not only Ngloho youth, but also Bleder youth and some children from other hamlets joined in.

Along with that event, the Head of the Hamlet said there was a *pageblug* (plague) infecting many people. Everywhere he went he found people sick, without a clear cause. A mysterious situation had arisen, which led him to contemplate. The answer was finally found, and it was related to the violation of the Gong Gerem mythical *wewaler*. Ngloho and Bleder villages were not allowed to organize and conduct art using gongs for a long time, as it could cause disaster. However, *kubrosiswo* uses *bendhe*, a smaller *gong*-shaped instrument. The head of the village realised they had made a mistake, leading to bad luck. He felt responsible for fixing the problem. Out of nowhere, he decided to perform a *tirakat*²⁵ to connect with *Sing Bahurekso* for seven days in Blumbang Bleder, at the *growong* stump (the

²⁵ *Tirakat* is a mystical contemplation with specific intentions in pursuit of a supernatural connection with *Sing Bahurekso*. It is a meditation, in Javanese culture, in which a person meditating and reciting certain mantras believes to generate intense intense heat. The heat leads to uncomfortable conditions around the area, and disturbs the supernatural ruler of the area, so that he will meet him and negotiate something that is desired by the person doing the *tirakat*. Related to the concept of *tirakat* can be found in Intan Driyo Utomo (Peny.), *Suntingan Teks Panatah Kayon* (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Nasional Indonesia, 2018), p. 4-18.

remains of a fallen tree with a hole in it) of an ares tree in the Sirah area - a place considered to be the mystical centre of the village.²⁶

In his *tirakat*, the head of the village intended to eliminate *pageblug* and asked *Sing Bahurekso* Blumbang Bleder for permission to establish the *kubrosiswo* art. After it is inaugurated, the fate of this art was completely handed over to the supernatural ruler. Even if it must disband, according to him, 'please!'.

The Destruction of the Santri Moral System and the Existence of the Myth of Gong Gerem

After being officially established in 1989, Kubrosiswo Bintang Mudo did not disband and remained in existence until this research was conducted. In the 1990s, it was the golden era of this art form. Feedback came from everywhere, both at the request of individuals and government agencies. Some competition activities were also often followed, occasionally also winning championships. However, in the 2000s became a turning point, not only *kubrosiswo*, but also other traditional arts experienced a fade. The last noticeable activity was around 2010-2014, when they were invited several times to hold performances and participate in traditional art exhibitions in Semarang.

The fading of traditional arts must be due to society's shift to modern entertainment. The entry of electricity in the mid-1990s and television (TV) in villages further privatized entertainment and made it practical to access. Moreover, the personal use of hand phones (HP) and the massive ownership of motor vehicles from the mid-2000s allowed everyone to get more information. They can choose any kind activities, from socializing, earning a living, education to entertainment, that were previously hard to reach due to limitations in terms of space, information and finances. In short, the village world is more open and traditional arts are just one of the many entertainment options to choose from.

In Pringsurat Sub-district in particular, this change coincides with the growth of industrialization since the 2000s. According to Rahmawati and Setiono in 2005 there are eleven large-scale industries in Temanggung Regency. In 2013, this number increased more

²⁶ *Sirah*, translated as head, is a place on the edge of Blumbang Bleder. In the past, it is believed that people often used it for meditation. It could also mean the center of the occult, to borrow Mircea Eliade's term, a kind of axis mundi, an invisible door connecting the microcosm with the macrocosm. See: Mircea Eliade, *Mitos Gerak Kembali yang Abadi: Kosmos dan Sejarah*, diterjemahkan oleh Cuk Ananta (Yogyakarta: Ikon Teralitera, 2002), p. 12.

than threefold to thirty-six, seventeen of which were timber industries.²⁷ The area of Pringsurat Sub-district along with Kranggan Sub-district was designated as an industrial area by the Temanggung Local Government.

The above changes impacted widely on social change in the village. New classes in society emerged, especially business groups and industrial laborers. People's professions became more diverse, not only farmers, but also carpenters, masons, timber workers, construction workers, odd-jobbers, goods and service providers, employees and so on. This leads to difficulties in organizing village activities such as gotong royong, community service, genduri, yasinan, recitation and other social activities requiring time together. As a result, social solidarity is fading away. In addition, a shift in established social values is inevitable. In the Ngloho and Bleder villages, rooted in *santri* culture, it is common to find various kinds of 'deviations' from *santri* ethics. 'Juvenile delinquency', such as dating, hair dyeing, piercings and tattoos that previously were nonexistent, can be found. Some parents also frequently complain of their children's behavior changing from what it used to be. Many children were bolder to their parents. Praying in *mushalas* and mosques is also increasingly less frequent. Many of them are also sometimes considered ignorant of performing the five daily prayers and fasting during the month of Ramadan. Furthermore, Quran recitation activities at the Islamic boarding school, which formed the foundation of education in Ngloho and Bleder, decreased dramatically in the 2000s. The children prefer to go to formal schools with degrees rather than to pesantren as it is considered easier to find work.

These shifts have led to social unrest in many ways. Some people are not able to explain that external factors affect them. Instead, they look to the presence of *kubrosiswo* art, considered to bring the bad luck of the *gong gerem* myth, inside.

One villager said the discourse linking the presence of *kubrosiswo* with the emergence of socio-religious problems, especially when responding to the phenomenon of possession occurring outside this art performance. According to him, people often experience possession in his place since the existence of *kubrosiswo*, which previously rarely happened. People in possession are sometimes very difficult to cure. Only when the *pawang gaib* (supernatural expert) of this art comes, this problem can be overcome. In response to this, the informant said that the demons 'know' the handler, so they are easily cured by him.

²⁷ Lihat: Febian Kuni Rahmawati dan Jawoto Sih Setiono, "Perkembangan Industri di Pedesaan dan Perubahan Karakter Wilayah Desa di Desa Nguwet Kecamatan Kranggan Kabupaten Temanggung", jurnal Teknik PWK, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2014, hlm. 796, <http://ejournal-sl.undip.ac.id/index.php/pwk>.

This basic structure of the emerging issue is not difficult to uncover. Possession means the controlling of a human being by something evil (read demons), thus making them *ora eling* - the distraction of their attention from God. The handler's ease in curing people in a state of possession due to his 'familiarity' with the demons is another implicit claim of his 'unity' with these 'evil' forces. As for possession becoming a massive phenomenon, it carries a hidden message that there has been a social '*ora eling*'. Both 'unity' and '*ora eling sosial*' are clearly fundamental *aqidah* issues in Islam. In other words, *kubrosiswo* has become a catalyst for the social co-optation of 'evil' forces that have distracted people from God. The issue of *aqidah*, which is not only individual but also social, seems to be reflected in the meaning of the rampant trance phenomenon above.

One religious figure from the village also made a statement associating *kubrosiswo* with Islamic issues. He said that he once imagined when it first entered Ngloho, then 'what this society would encounter' (read 'disaster'). This conversation was conducted in responding to various kinds of societal shifts that he thought were getting further away from *santri* culture. Indeed, his judgement was 'proven' and it was to blame for everything. Similarly, one of the sixty-year-old residents of the village, where it is located, said the same thing. When he was asked to respond to the fading of it, he said that the art is not suitable in his village, due to the prohibition of the *gong gerem* myth. Consequently, not only is it increasingly less popular, but according to him, 'society has now become like this'. He uses this phrase to express the change in the community and how far they have drifted away from their Islamic cultural order.

In the previous discussion (Pageplug: A 'Balak' for the Beginning of the Gong Gerem Myth), the Head of the Village's statement, 'After the inauguration, if *kubrosiswo* disband, go ahead!' is a statement made in the present to explain his role in the past. Regardless of whether he had said this in the past or not, it clearly carries the present context. When the researcher discussed him, he was sixty-five years old. Despite no longer being the head of the village, he was well known as a religious figure. He taught the Quran to children and was often the imam of the *mushala*. His family is also known to be religious. Many of his descendant study at *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). As someone who realized the wrong act (read violating *wewaler mitos gong gerem*) in the past for his initiative for the establishment of *kubrosiswo*, then his statement is a form of 'escape' responsibility for the history (read 'disaster') that was then created. Although he did not explicitly state it, but

kubrosiswo has been regarded as bearing the consequences for the destruction of their Islamic cultural order. Indeed, initiating *kubrosiswo*, which has enormous consequences for moral issues, is a form of contradictory action to one's religious self. However, the gong gerem myth follows and embodies the historical movements of the community. Thus, the 'truth' of the gong gerem myth is once again 'proven' in this regard.

CONCLUSION

The concepts of '*jogedan*', '*ora eling*', and 'the destruction of santri morality' are key concepts in understanding the existence of the gong gerem myth. *Jogedan* as an abangan culture represents a notion of religious identity and belief that is at opposite sides of Islam. It becomes an avoidable part of Islamic art etiquette because it leads to '*ora eling*', the turning of one's faith to forces other than Allah (read Satan). The power of the devil himself is believed to lead people to misguidance (read disaster). As *kubrosiswo* art emerged and was perceived to have brought damage to the moral order, the impact of the gong gerem myth overshadowed the Ngloho and Bleder communities. This myth, however, contains a *wewaler* warning that they are not allowed to use gongs in their performances as it could cause a flood. The *kubrosiswo* uses a gong (*bendhe*). Meanwhile, the gong contains a symbolic meaning of the concept of *jogedan*. The destruction of the *santri's* moral behaviour, associated with the existence of *kubrosiswo*, urgently reminds us of the *jogedan* that makes people *ora eling*. Therefore, the *wewaler* about gong is basically a prohibition symbol not to convert to non-Islam, while the flood is symbolized in the destruction of the *santri's* morality system. Based on this understanding, the gong gerem myth is nothing but a symbolic defence of the Ngloho and Bleder communities' Islamic faith.

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