

RITUALS, LOCAL BELIEFS, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE CIOMAS BANTEN COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This article discusses the local beliefs, the characteristics and cultural identity as well as the socio-religious rituals of Ciomas society. It is a field research using ethnographical method based on anthropological perspective. To analyze the data, the researcher uses structural-functional approach. The finding shows the champion character of jawara is frequently identified with negative labels by several authors such as Williams and Kartodirdjo. The fame of Golok Ciomas that has historical and cultural values for Bantenese society in general is also often referred to champion figures who are rude, valiant, and act like a criminal. As a matter of fact, for majority of Bantenese society, such distinctive characteristics have more positive meanings that were inherited by their ancestors and they still possess religious values maintained up to the present.

Artikel ini mengkaji sistem kepercayaan lokal, karakteristik dan identitas kultural masyarakat, serta ritual sosial keagamaan masyarakat Ciomas. Artikel ini merupakan hasil penelitian lapangan dengan menggunakan metode etnografi dengan menggunakan pendekatan antropologis. Dalam menganalisa data, peneliti menggunakan pendekatan fungsional-struktural. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa "karakter jawara" seringkali oleh beberapa penulis seperti Williams dan Kartodirdjo digambarkan dengan label-label negatif. Popularitas Golok Ciomas yang memiliki nilai historis dan kultural bagi masyarakat Banten secara umum juga seringkali disandingkan dengan sosok jawara yang terkenal dengan sikapnya yang keras, berani, dan suka berbuat kriminal. Padahal, bagi sebagian besar masyarakat Ciomas sendiri karakteristik-karakteristik khas

tersebut sebenarnya memiliki makna yang lebih positif yang diwariskan oleh nenek moyang dan masih memiliki nilai-nilai religius yang masih dipertahankan hingga saat ini.

Keywords: *Ritual, Local Beliefs, Cultural Identity*

Introduction

The Ciomas Banten community is often seen as a society with stubborn character and a *jawara* (champion) spirit. When mentioning the name Ciomas, people often associate it with the *Golok* (machete) *Ciomas*, *jawara*, stubborn, brave, stabbed, and other acts of violence. The negative connotation towards the Ciomas people still attached to this day is, of course, not without reason or cause.

However, the level of religiosity of the Ciomas people is also a positive image that is quite inherent in the eyes of outsiders. This is indicated by the many *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), *kiai* (Islam experts), and *hikmah* experts who have quite a wide popularity, both in terms of scientific (Islam) level and the ability of *hikmah* (magic), in the view of outsiders. The positive image attached to these religious figures and magical experts has become a magnet for outsiders, both from the Banten area and outside Banten, to study religion and ask for *hikmah* (magical) for various pragmatic purposes, as well as those who just *sowan* (*silaturahmi*/ pay a social visit) and asked for blessings from the *Kiai* and *hikmah* experts at Ciomas Banten.

The characteristics of the Ciomas people described above are certainly an exciting phenomenon for some people who do not know and understand well the cultural identity of the Ciomas people. On the one hand, negative labels are difficult to erase from the image of the Ciomas community from the outsiders' perspective. On the other hand, the number of *pesantren* and charismatic figures who have become traditional leaders of the Ciomas community with their religious and magical knowledge abilities has become a counterbalance in imaging the identity of the Ciomas community. Various religious rituals and customary traditions based on spiritual values, which are routinely carried out every year, also show an interesting religious phenomenon that is part of the Ciomas people's cultural identity. Therefore, this paper tries to explain: how is the religious system of the Ciomas community?; what are the characteristics and cultural identity of the Banten people?; and what are the forms of rituals and socio-religious traditions of the Ciomas people?

Research Method

This article is the result from field research using ethnographic research methods, which are descriptive qualitative. Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The main goal of ethnography is to understand the point of view of the indigenous people and their relationship to life and to get their view of the world. Furthermore, ethnography means building a systemic understanding of all human cultures from the perspective of one studying that culture.

The methods used to collect data are literature review, involved observation, and in-depth interviews. In analyzing the data, the researcher uses a structural-functional approach which is a view of the sociocultural system which emphasizes that the structures observed show functions in a particular form or that structure shows tasks in the broader system.

Religion and Cultural Relations

There are two primary views regarding the relationship between culture and religion. The first view states that culture is part of religion; the second view states that religion is part of culture. Those who try to explain all phenomena related to human life cognitively cannot understand the first view. Conversely, the second view is unacceptable for those who believe that human life is the realization of revelation, which does not require interpretation (Kusumohamidjojo, 2010: 219).

In all cultural contexts worldwide, religion is integral to other aspects of cultural activity. Religion is what people do day to day. In other words, religion becomes a set of ideas and beliefs in which everyone can become involved, as well as a framework for their life experiences and daily activities. The following study of religion and culture is to understand how religion is an essential element that manifests their differences. This means that studying religion is comparative, or more precisely, studying religion is cross-cultural, seeing religions crossing areas of different cultures (Nye, 1992: 3).

Regarding the mention of religion and religion, Harsojo (1984) is the type of anthropologist who does not want to get involved in the polemic by explaining his perspective on religion. *First*, he prefers to use the term 'religion' rather than '*agama*' (another way to refer to religion) because, according to him, '*agama*' already has a specific meaning, such as '*agama* Islam or *agama* Nasrani.' Harsojo also prefers to use the term 'religion' rather than 'confession' as a term that wants to summarize the human belief system as a general phenomenon. *Second*, he explained that anthropology investigates religion empirically and comparatively to understand the origins of religion, functions of religion, and systematics of religion. Anthropology does not investigate the truth in religion but investigates the influence of religion on humans and society and its impact on cultural development. Religion is part of human culture; therefore, the two approaches (theology and anthropology) have no need to contradict each other (Harsojo, 1984: 220-221).

According to Leslie A. White, religion, or one of the elements that make up a religion, namely belief, is a part of the ideological system. This system itself is one of the core manifestations of culture. Thus, religion is part of and formed within the scope of human culture (in Radam, 2001: 2).

In this study, the authors understand religion not merely as a religion but as a cultural phenomenon. Religion is the unique cultural face of a nation. Religion is the basis of belief, so the cultural aspect often floats above it. This represents religion as a universal cultural phenomenon. Religion is a distinctive part of culture. According to Malinowski (1954: 17), no one in this world, no matter how primitive that person is, has no religion and does not believe in magic. This statement was expressed based on data and the fact that many studies have been performed on the beliefs and religion of primitive peoples in various parts of the world. In their minds, there is a belief in something sacred (the sacred) and something considered normal (the profane). These two domains can never be separated from the human mind. The sacred domain appears and is present in the form of belief in magic and religion, and the profane domain appears and develops into science. This means that, no matter how primitive a society is, its ideas are always inseparable from these two domains.

Religion contains various elements such as beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, attitudes, patterns of behavior, and the thoughts and feelings of its adherents. Various activities such as praying, prostrations, offerings, sacrifices, *slametan* (feast), eating together, dancing and singing, processions, performing sacred drama arts, fasting, asceticism, meditating, casting spells, applying magic, believing in spirits (supernatural), providing *sesajen* (offerings) and so on are part of religious activities (Koentjaraningrat, 1980: 81). It is this activity that makes a belief become a religion.

Community Religion System Ciomas Banten

Banten is an area that was once one of the centers of international trade and the most potent Islamic sultanate in the Nusantara (archipelago of Indonesia). The people mentioned in Snouck Hugronje's notes as Muslim people who are more self-aware and more obedient in carrying out religious teachings compared to other regions on the island of Java make Banten's image a religious area. Still in Snouck Hugronje's notes, at the end of the 19th century, Bantenese were very prominent people among Southeast Asians who settled in Mecca, both as teachers and students (Hakim, 2006: 83; Ali, 2012: 16-17; Bruinessen, 1995: 246).

This positive image attached to the people of Banten indeed cannot be separated from the role of the Banten rulers (Sultans) at that time, who were concerned about politics and the economy and paid more attention to the religious sector. In Martin van Bruinessen's notes, it is said that to strengthen and develop the religious field, the Sultan of Banten invited Indonesian scholars and scholars from the Middle East, especially Mecca, to come and stay for a certain period in Banten. They teach the sciences of religion to the community. The good relations between the Sultanate of Banten and Mecca as the center and qibla of world Islam helped build a reasonably solid Islamic civilization in Banten. To gain religious legitimacy, several Sultans of Banten requested the title "Sultan" from Syarif in Mecca. This title makes the Sultans of Banten seen not only as state rulers but also as religious leaders (scholar/wali) legitimately. The Sultanate of Banten showed great love and concern for religious knowledge and high appreciation and respect for the scholars. Therefore, in several notes written by

Europeans who had visited the sultanate of Banten in the 16th and 17th centuries, it was stated that the sultanate of Banten became the center of Islamic scientific activities in the Nusantara (Bruinessen, 1995: 247-248).

Even though Islam has become a symbol of a new civilization for the Banten people since the time of the sultanate, the Sultans of Banten did not necessarily erase the traces of Banten's local traditions and culture that existed long before Islam entered and developed in Banten. An indication that the rulers of Banten at that time still valued and respected local traditions and culture is the story in '*Sadjarah Banten*,' which states that Sultan Agung Tirtayasa, since he was young and still serving as a Young Sultan, was known as the son of a noble who liked the culture. He is often actively involved in several Banten folk game traditions such as *raket* play (a kind of *wayang wong* (classical theatrical performance)), *dedewa*, *sasaptoan*, and various other local traditions (Tjandrasmita 2011: 29). This indicates that the Sultan of Banten considered a religious leader, scholar, and even a *wali*, has never tried to erase traces of local traditions and culture which are deemed not to damage the aqeedah of Muslims. Even in some ways, trying to make a variety of local traditions and culture as a medium of da'wah in spreading Islam to the people of Banten, who previously still adhered to animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Michrob & Chudari 2011: 19-46; Lubis 2004: 1-24; Lubis 2006: 2-13).

Concerning Allah's books, the Ciomas community, as stated by K.H. Anas Albandanidji (2011), understands that Allah has sent down holy books before the Qur'an, namely the Zabur, Taurat, and Injil. However, according to Mashadi (2011), only the Qur'an is the holy book that maintains its sanctity and purity, and the Qur'an complements the previous books. This understanding seems to be shared by all Indonesian Muslims, even the world. In this case, Nurkholis Madjid argues that no Muslim doubts the authenticity and legitimacy of his holy book. According to Islamic beliefs, the Qur'an is the ultimate guide to life that was revealed by Allah to mankind through the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Peace be upon him) as the last of the Prophets and Rasul (Madjid, 2000: 3).

Regarding the last day or doomsday, the Ciomas people believe there will be an end and a day of judgment after this world has been destroyed. The last belief understood by the Ciomas people and sourced from the Qur'an is the belief in Qadha and Qadar (providence)

of God. In this case, Mrs. Een argues that everything happens by God's will; no one can refuse God's destiny (2011).

Conception about Magic, the Unseen Realm, and Spirits

Belief in the supernatural world and the practice of magic seem to be found in many parts of Indonesia, such as Java. In this case, O'Keefe (1982: 1) argues that belief in magic is not only found in the stone age and primitive societies but can also be found in almost every era.

Zainuri and most of the Ciomas people believe that apart from creating humans, animals, plants, and everything in nature, God also created other creatures that cannot be seen with the naked eye (2011). Concerning jinn, Mr. Ai, a shaman, believes that not all jinn are evil; there is good jinn or often called *jin Islam*, and there are also evil jinn or *jin kafir*, who always disturb humans (2011). Ghosts, devils, demons, evil spirits, and the like are supernatural beings or evil jinn whose lives are dedicated to disturbing human life. However, some believe that humans can connect to these supernatural beings. Ust. Rhmn, for example, believes that although humans cannot see jinns or other supernatural beings, they can interact with these supernatural beings spiritually through certain rituals and formulas (2011). In fact, according to K.H.F., if successful, those who can communicate with supernatural beings through supernatural communication can subdue these creatures and even order them to carry out their orders (2011). People with this ability are often asked to solve practical human problems through their magical powers.

In economic life, many traders, entrepreneurs, and those who work in government agencies and companies also use magic as part of their efforts to obtain abundant fortune and certain positions. Their visit to magicians, with various purposes and interests, shows how the people of Ciomas still depend on the success and smooth running of their economy on supernatural things. Furthermore, another aspect of life that often involves the magical abilities of magicians is

the health aspect. The Ciomas people, in particular, still believe that certain diseases, both physical and those caused by magical evil, can be treated with magical methods or with specific prayers from the *kyai*. Regarding the magical function in treatment, Mr. H. Ry (64 years) said that the various medical treatments he underwent to treat his stroke were unsuccessful, so he underwent treatment with a magician. After undergoing three treatments with a magician who attached coins to his body while reading mantras, his condition gradually improved (2011).

From Mr. H. Ry's narrative, we can also conclude that in terms of health, some Ciomas people still believe that the magical powers of the *kyai*, magicians, and shamans can also perform treatment, and the results appear to be more effective and felt more quickly by patients. These empirical experiences perhaps maintain the magical culture in the Ciomas people's culture. Therefore, the Ciomas area is often a destination for alternative medicine for patients with various diseases. The results of observations by researchers at one of the *pesantren Salafi* (traditional Islamic boarding schools) in Ciomas, many times the researchers came to the *pesantren* every day, there were always people who drove sick patients to the cleric's house, both coming from the Ciomas area, as well as from outside the city and the scope of Banten. The prayer from the *kyai* and water that the *kyai* has recited is a great hope for the patient and his family for the recovery of the patient's illness. Such a great suggestion with the power of prayer and the magical power of the *kyai* becomes essential for the patient's recovery.

This phenomenon shows that belief in magic is a social phenomenon that exists in both traditional and modern societies, including the Ciomas people of Banten. Because of this, most of the Ciomas people believe that magic exists and occurs in their area of life, and they believe that social situations can be influenced, changed, healed, destroyed, and transformed by magical actions. In this case, magic can build trust in uncertain situations (Malinowski, 1955: 79).

Malinowski's opinion can also be a basis for why some people in Ciomas Banten still believe in magical beliefs and practices in many socio-religious aspects; they tend to solve

practical problems they encounter in everyday life by relying on magical experts and their supernatural powers. In this case, K.H.F. said many residents met him to solve their various problems. His *hikmah* (magical) knowledge also does not come out of Islam because it comes from classical Arabic books such as *Mamba' Usul al-Hikmah* by al-Buni (2011).

What was told by K.H.F. above cannot be separated from the people's firm belief in supernatural powers, which are capable of helping to realize their hopes and desires in these uncertain conditions. Furthermore, Malinowski argues that, like religion, magic also appears and functions in situations of emotional stress, such as in crisis conditions, in empty states because of pursuing something that is considered necessary, in unhappy love life, and in hatred (Malinowski, 1955: 87). Various life problems are encountered by the people in the village of Ciomas, Banten, such as diseases that do not go away, both physical and psychological, and illnesses that are considered to be caused by black magic. Some examples include *teluh*, *tenung*, *santet*, and *guna-guna* (black magic); depression due to being rejected by love, having difficulty finding a mate, finding it difficult to get a job, wanting to get rich quickly, and other life problems are factors that cause emotional stress which causes them to no longer be able to think rationally. Ultimately, they prefer to solve their problems quickly and practically by visiting magical experts.

In social and political life, both at the local, regional, and national levels, some Ciomas people still trust *Kiai hikmah* and shamans to achieve social position and social prestige. For example, in the village head elections, almost all village head candidates in Ciomas turned to magicians to help them win the village head elections. Various reasons cause them to prefer subtle ways by using magic to win this village head election. *First*, they did it as a preventive measure for the same actions taken by other village head candidates. *Second*, they don't feel confident. *Third*, because of encouragement or suggestions from family, relatives, or supporters; *fourth*, the action is part of an *ikhtiar* (effort) that is inward in nature because, according to them, Islam also encourages people to try not only outwardly but also inwardly by visiting *kiai*, *hikmah* experts, shamans or *wong pinter* (Humaeni, 2009 : 45).

Because of this belief in the occult, magical practices performed by *hikmah* experts or *kiai hikmah*, shamans, and *wong pinter* are still commonly found in the Ciomas area. *Kyai*, for the Ciomas people, are not only seen as figures who master religious sciences but also have magical abilities originating from religion through certain formulas and rituals, which are used to solve and help practical human problems and needs. Furthermore, shamans or *wong pinter*, considered able to subdue the power of supernatural beings or evil spirits through their magical formulas and rituals, also occupy a special place for the Ciomas people in solving their life problems.

However, the Ciomas people believe that there is a much bigger, stronger, and higher power above all kinds of supernatural beings, namely the power of God. No matter how great and powerful the magicians' abilities are, they always rely on the results of the knowledge they have of the strength and power of God. In this case, K.H. Maksum believes that only Allah can heal, provide sustenance, provide a mate, and do anything, even that which cannot and is impossible to be done by humans or their other creatures (2011).

Apart from the belief in the various magical practices mentioned above, it turns out that the idea of the existence of spirits, jinns, demons, and the like in the minds of the Ciomas people also persists to this day. In the view of the Ciomas people, several types of ghosts or demons disturb humans and often appear before humans. Mrs Tati, for example, told about the existence of the *kelong wewe*, the disturbing ghost who kidnaps a girl who, when found, looks like a madman because she likes to talk to herself. In addition to the story about the *kelong wewe* mentioned above, there is belief in other types of ghosts or demons such as *gogodan*, *bebongkong*, *pocong*, *kuntilanak*, *tuyul*, *wewe gombel*, *Nyi Artati*, *siluman*, *babi ngepet* and so on (2011).

The Ciomas people's belief in supernatural things seems to be a common phenomenon in various places worldwide. Many studies in various places around the world examine angels, jinns, ghosts, and other supernatural beings considered to have extraordinary powers. The idea of a supernatural being almost always appears in every religion and belief,

both in modern and pre-literate society and virtually every culture and era. It seems that belief in the Supernatural is an integral part of the human belief system. Therefore, Rudolf Otto, a theologian, argues that all religious systems, beliefs, and religions in the world are centered on a concept of the supernatural (*mysterium*) which is considered almighty (*tremendum*) and sacred (*sacer*) by humans (in Pritchard 1984: 49-50)

In this case, Spencer (1876: 281) argues that belief in ghosts has formed the basis of the concept of the supernatural at its earliest. The first traceable conception of the 'existence' of a supernatural being, he argues, is that of a ghost, although this conception may be obscure and varies among communities that depend on hunting and gathering for food. This conception, according to Morris (2007: 117), is a rational explanation based on inferences from events and phenomena that are not understood. The idea of a natural explanation only developed in a more complex society. The idea of ghosts then developed into the concept of God, ghosts from remote communities or ancestors who were considered essential and had divine characteristics, and offerings placed in sacred places became the basis for ritual ceremonies. Hence, Spencer (1876: 411) argues that 'ancestor worship is at the root of every religion.' In this regard, Fischer (1980: 137-145) refers to belief in devils, ancestral spirits, amulets, and other supernatural beings as 'folk religion' or 'popular religion' with a syncretic pattern.

It seems that mystical and magical thoughts will always have a place in the human dimension of life because, in the realm of human thought, there is a mysterious and magical space that can arise at any time when humans are faced with conditions that are difficult to overcome with their rational thinking. The tendency to solve various practical human problems did not appear later after humans encountered various complex issues, but this dimension already exists and has been created in the realm of human thought, in addition to the realm of rational thought. Therefore, humans always do, which in Eliade's terms, is 'the eternal return' (movement back to the Eternal/supernatural) (Eliade, 1974: 112-115; Susanto 1987: 64-70).

Identity and Characteristics of the Ciomas Community

Every society has its own identity and cultural characteristics. These differences can be seen from the language used, inherited traditions, and culture that shapes association and interaction between community members. To understand the culture of an ethnic group correctly, we must understand the ins and outs of the community, and conversely, to gain broad insights about society, we must understand the nature of the culture of that society (Harsojo, 1984: 126).

The identity and characteristics of a community will be easy to observe, analyze, and conclude by other people who live outside the area. The following are some of the characteristics inherent in the features of the Ciomas community in general:

1. Stubborn and brave character

From outsiders' perspectives, the Ciomas people are known for their brave and stubborn character. The Ciomas people often clash with fellow Ciomas residents and residents from other areas, creating the image of the Ciomas people as people known to have stubborn and brave characters.

2. Jawara

It is common knowledge that Banten is known as the nest of *jawara*. Various uprisings and riots from the colonial era until independence involved the figures of *jawara* in opposing colonialism in the Banten area. Their presence, on the one hand, is a source of pride for the people of Banten because they are seen as helpers and defenders of the people, but on the other hand, their actions are often anarchic. So, there is a dualism of characters played by

3. Jawara in Banten.

Concerning the relationship between the *jawara* of Ciomas Banten and the *kyai*, according to information from several informants, it appears that the *jawara* of Ciomas Banten are very respectful and protect the *kyai* in Ciomas. Tihami's study of *kyai* and *jawara* seems to have something in common with what happened in Ciomas Village: *kyai* is a source of magical possession for *jawara*. Therefore, it is taboo for a *jawara* to argue, let alone fight a *kyai*. If they dare to fight the *kyai*, the result will be *kuwalat*, namely punishment for those who oppose the *kyai* with the result that all magical powers are lost (Tihami, 1992: 21).

4. *Golok Ciomas*

The *Golok Ciomas* is a cultural heritage with historical value and mystical stories. This traditional weapon is the pride of the people of Banten, specifically for the people of Ciomas. The popularity of the *Golok Ciomas* is not only known by the people of Banten but also throughout the Nusantara because, according to the story, the *Golok Ciomas* has been used by the people of Banten since the sultanate era and continued until the colonial period.

For the people of Banten, the *Golok Ciomas* are believed to have mystical value, as does the kris for the Javanese people. This machete is specially made with a special ritual and carried out at certain times. Therefore, the original *Golok Ciomas* is believed to be a powerful weapon with extraordinary magical powers to immobilize enemies. According to the story developed in the community, the enemy can be easily defeated using this machete without removing it from its sheath. Another feature of this *Golok Ciomas* is its magical power and the power of poison, which is difficult to cure if a slit or slash of this machete injures someone. A banana tree that is cut with a machete will die of rot (Solikhin & Supriyatna 2003: 3-7).

Acts of violence and the brave attitude of a particular group of people with various backgrounds and socio-cultural conditions are shared by many people in multiple regions, both in Indonesia and other countries. The terms *jago*, *jawara*, warrior, bandit, and so on almost refer to a particular group of people who have more courage and often carry out various physical or violent activities for things considered proper or because of trivial things. Violence itself has many meanings for the perpetrators. Kiefer, as quoted by Wiyata, stated that acts of violence for the Tausug tribe in the Philippines mean manhood and courage. This is because courage is a cultural behavior that has a symbolic meaning about the fundamental values of self-esteem and honor for men of the Tausug tribe, so the act of violence committed by the Tausug community is a cultural behavior that gains legitimacy from the community environment. In this context, every act of violence is a symbolic reflection of the cultural values of society whose meaning must be understood (Wiyata, 2006: 17). Thus, the acts of

violence and courage shown by the Ciomas people also need to be understood as a symbolic reflection of the fundamental values of society whose meaning must be understood.

Rituals in the Social-Religious Tradition of the Ciomas Community

As a society whose entire population is Muslim, the Ciomas people know, understand, and practice the rituals of worship to God as taught in the Qur'an and hadith and carry out various socio-religious rituals as part of the local community's traditions. Several social-religious rituals are routinely carried out every year by the people of Ciomas Banten, namely:

1. Islamic Holiday Ceremony

In the Islamic calendar, several dates are used for the *Perayaan Hari Besar Islam (Celebration of Islamic Holidays) (PHBI)*. Muslim communities in Indonesia perform several ceremonies or *slametan*, including in the Ciomas area of Banten, in welcoming and celebrating the Islamic Holiday. In the Ciomas area, people usually perform certain rituals of *slametan* to welcome and celebrate Islamic holidays, including:

2. The month of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar)

In the month of Muharram, on the 10th of Muharram or the 10th of *Syura*, the Ciomas people perform the *Slametan Tolak Bala* (asking for protection from disaster) ritual. On this date, every house is usually asked for rice sincerely. This rice is then collected and made into '*bubur Syuro*' (rice porridge and a little salt, to be eaten together by all the residents (*ngeriung*) while reading *do'a selamat* (prayer for salvation)

3. Safar Month

The month of Safar is known as the month in which Allah sends down various diseases to the world. Therefore, a ritual or *Slametan Tolak Bala* is also held this month, better known as *Rebo Wekasan*. This activity is usually carried out on the last Wednesday of Safar by performing the *Tolak Bala* prayer in the congregation at the mosque or prayer room. On this day, parents are usually not allowed their children to travel far for fear of an accident or disaster.

4. Mulud Month

The Mulud month, better known as the month of Rabiul Awal, on the 12th of the Mulud Month, is celebrated as the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad

SAW. This event is generally celebrated on a large scale, such as Eid al-Fitr. In the Ciomas area, this *panjang Mulud* event is known as "Ngalaha." In this vibrant activity, the entire *panjang Mulud* is taken to the prayer room or Mosque after being paraded, then *diriung* (be eaten together or brought home) after praying together.

5. Sili Mulud Month

The month of *Sili Mulud*, or the month of Rabiul Akhir, is celebrated as the birthday of Siti Fatimah bint Muhammad SAW. In Ciomas, this event is carried out simply by the reciting association of women. Each recitation member brings a *pipiti* or small *cecepon* (a container for carrying rice and other food), which she takes to the *madrasah* (Islamic school) or the *majlis ta'lim* (Islamic learning places). The food is then collected and prayed by the *kiai* or *ustadz* (male teacher) before being eaten or *diriung* together.

6. Rajab Month

The month of Rajab is known as the commemoration of the Isra Mi'raj of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, carried out on the 27th of Rajab. To commemorate Isra Mi'raj, residents of Ciomas make food that will *diriung* together in the prayer room or mosque. Apart from the *riung* together, every year, the Ciomas people perform a study on the Dardir book (a book containing the history of the journey of the Prophet Muhammad during the Mi'raj Isra). This recitation is held on the evening of the 27th of Rajab, from 8 pm to 3 or 4 in the morning.

7. Rowah Month

The month of Rowah is commemorated as an event or *slametan* for changing books or records of human deeds. This month, Allah closes the old record of human deeds and replaces it with a new one. To commemorate this event, Ciomas residents perform regular *slametan* and *riung* at the prayer room, usually held between the 12th of Rowah and the 25th of Rowah.

8. Fasting Month

The fasting month or Ramadan, is the holy month in which all Muslims must fast for a whole month. To commemorate this fasting month, the people of Ciomas usually hold a *Slametan Ngunut* in the middle of Ramadan. Taraweeh prayer, which ends with the witr prayer, is usually accompanied by the Qunut prayer from the night of the 15th of Ramadan. The *riung* event is held then at night on the 15th of Ramadan, usually after the Taraweh prayer in the congregation.

9. *Shawwal Month*

The month of Shawwal, the 1st of Shawwal to be precise, is a day of victory for Muslims worldwide who have undergone a war of desire, fasting for a whole month. In Ciomas, to commemorate Eid al-Fitr, the community not only performs sunnah prayers in the morning but also visits their families and relatives and makes pilgrimages. Residents also serve various types of food and pastries.

10. *Haji Month*

In the month of Haji, Muslim communities worldwide commemorate Eid al-Adha, or Sacrifice Day, to be exact, from the 10th-13th of the month of Haji. Like Eid al-Fitr, Ciomas residents perform the same rituals and activities as on Eid al-Fitr.

From the explanation above, it appears that the various socio-religious rituals in the Ciomas community are a form of glorifying and respecting religion by them, explicitly symbolizing their gratitude to God. The socio-religious rituals they perform are religious expressions that arise because of the awareness that they are part of being and part of a social community that needs to be involved and participate in various socio-religious activities, which are their tradition and culture.

Agus believes that belief in the sacred and supernatural requires special treatment. Therefore, there are various procedures for treating something sacred. Ceremonies, offerings, *sesajen*, and other ritual forms often cannot be understood economically, rationally, and pragmatically. It is done as an effort to persuade those who are considered sacred and supernatural so that they want to fulfill their pragmatic needs. Because something is believed to be sacred, it should not be treated like ordinary objects or profane things. There are specific rules that must be followed, and there are also prohibitions or restrictions that must be avoided (Agus, 2005: 98).

Our failure or absence in a ritual activity will be considered a form of our impoliteness, and our society will regard us as strange and foreign. In this case, the basic definition of a ritual is that rituals are actions performed for more than their beneficial purpose (Nye, 1988: 133-134). This means that rituals are actions that have a deeper meaning beyond

the ritual actions themselves. So, in short, the ritual is interpreted as beneficial action.

Edmund Leach, as quoted by Eller (2007:110), in this case, defines ritual as behavior that forms part of a sign system and whose job is to communicate information. Catherine Bell, in her book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, argues that ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies to regulate some activities of change from others, to create and provide privileges for a qualitative difference between the sacred and the profane (ordinary), and to ascribe these differences to the notion of human reality that transcends human powers as agents of life (Bell, 1992: 74). Rappaport (1999: 24) defines ritual as the performance of a series of actions and formal expressions that are more or less the same, which the actor does not fully encode.

From the explanation above, it is clear that behavior or ritual action is the most crucial element in the cultural life of society. In this case, Malory Nye argues that most of the ritual behavior is carried out unconsciously and out of habit, without even thinking about whether the ritual action has a meaning and purpose. Sometimes, he argues, the automaticity of such ritual actions prompts us to call them rituals in the sense of thoughtless and meaningless rituals. However, not all ritual actions are carried out thoughtlessly; some rituals may be performed reverently and solemnly (Nye, 1988: 132). This religious ritual also shows the desire of the Ciomas people to maintain their cultural identity as a religious society.

The Tradition of the *Slametan* at the Rites of Transition

Humans continue to experience development throughout their lives, starting from infants, children, adolescents, adults, and parents and then will experience death. In several areas such as Pelalawan District, Riau Province (Hidayat, 2009), in the Toba-North Tapanuli Batak (Simandjuntak, 1993), in Madura (Djojomartono, 1993; Munir 1993), in Java (Sulaiman, 1993), in Minangkabau (Abdullah, 1993), and Bali (Dhari, 1993), to commemorate the transition from infancy to adolescence, from youth to adulthood, and so on, rituals, ceremonies, and various *slametan* are often held

as a sign or symbol that humans are ever-changing creatures; change not only in a physical sense but also in personality and mental maturity.

In the Ciomas area, most people still perform various *slametan* traditions to fill in and commemorate this transitional period. These *slametan* rituals are not only performed by the nuclear family but also involve other members of the community, especially relatives or closest neighbors because, in this *slametan* tradition, there is a communal ceremony (usually in the form of *riung* accompanied by reading specific prayers or *wirids*) carried out together at a particular time.

Following are some of the *slametan* traditions in rites of transition that are still practiced by most of the Ciomas people:

1. *Slametan* ritual during pregnancy

In the Ciomas area, women who are married and are pregnant with their first child generally carry out the '*mitungbulan*' or '*rurujakan*' tradition during their seventh month of pregnancy. They cook various types of food, including rice, side dishes, vegetables, and different kinds of cakes. Of the various types of food served, one kind of food must be served at this *rurujakan* event, namely *rujak* (fruit salad with spicy dressing).

2. The *slametan* ritual during childbirth

A newborn baby will bring happiness to his family. To welcome a new baby, the Ciomas people will usually perform a *slametan suguh tamu* ritual on the day the baby is born, or if the birth is at night, the event *suguh tamu* is held in the morning. Unlike the *nujuh bulanan* events, this *slametan suguh tamu* is generally held simply and perfunctory by inviting around 10-15 close neighbors. Furthermore, after the baby is 7-40 days old, there will be another *slametan* event, namely shaving or aqeeqah.

3. Circumcision *slametan* ritual

In Ciomas, for baby girls, during the *slametan* shavings, a circumcision ritual is usually also performed. According to some Ciomas people, baby girls should be circumcised at the age of 7 days-40 days, up to the maximum age of 7 months, and it should be done in a straightforward ceremony without any *riungan*. For male circumcision, it is usually done at the age of 2-10 years. In contrast to female circumcision, the *slametan* for male circumcision is often lively.

4. Puberty *slametan* ritual for adolescent girls

Girls in their adolescent age and marked by their first menstruation are also usually given the *slametan* ritual. This *slametan*, for the Ciomas people, is called the *kekelepon slametan*. The name *kekelepon* is in accordance with the name of the cake, which is made to mark the first menstrual period for adolescent girls. These cakes are then distributed to neighbors after prayers are recited.

5. *Slametan* ritual during marriage

The wedding ceremony is the most lively *slametan* ritual for the Ciomas community compared to other *slametan* rituals. There are many people involved in this ceremony. The bigger and livelier the more guests who attend this event, the more visible the social status of the person holding the event. After the marriage ceremony, there is often a *ayunan* (swing) or *saweran* (giving valuables at an event) ritual by a swing practitioner while the bride and groom sit in the tent (*puade*) provided for the bride and groom. Sometimes the ritual of performing *degung* (Sundanese gamelan) is also served by a practitioner (Masitoh, 2011).

6. The *slametan* ritual for building and settling a new house

Building or settling a new house for the Ciomas people needs to hold a particular *slametan* ritual so that the house brings blessings and brings safety to its dwellers later. To settle in a new house, the ritual is known as *ngaruwat umah*, generally held simply by inviting several neighbors to perform *riungan* and recite Surah *Yaa-siin*. Meanwhile, to build a new house or before groundbreaking, a *slametan Munar* is often held. In this *slametan* ritual, a practitioner reads the '*syaiikh*' or '*wawacan syaiikh*' (Saip, 2011).

7. The *slametan* ritual at the death ceremony

To commemorate this death ceremony, there are various *slametan* rituals performed by the Ciomas people. *Tahlilan* is a prayer ritual performed for the deceased from the 1st to the 7th night, usually done every evening at Maghrib or Isya. Furthermore, *nelung dina*, *mitung dina*, *matured dina*, and *nyatus dina* which is done to commemorate the 3rd, 7th, 40th, and 100th day after death. After the *nyatus dina* ceremony is over, the death *slametan* ritual stops, then it is carried out again once a year on the day the deceased dies, also known as *khaul* or sending prayers.

From the various *slametan* rituals of the Ciomas people above, it appears that every transitional phase of human life has meaning and significance for the Ciomas people. The various *slametan* activities show the existence of belief and awareness in the minds of the Ciomas people that human life will always experience changes and shifts from one phase to another, which are mutually interrelated. Because of the importance of each of these human transitional phases, people carry out religious activities, namely *slametan*, as a symbol of communication between humans and God or certain supernatural beings where humans, as weak creatures, ask for God's help or certain spirits to be able to provide protection and safety for humans at each transitional period. The *slametan* ceremony is the center of the religious ceremonial system in the *Kejawen* religion in Javanese society, which is not found in pure Islamic teachings. This ritual is a local tradition or culture that has undergone adjustments and mixing between Hindu-Javanese and Islamic elements (Sulaiman, 1993: 101-102).

Various *slametan* rituals during the transition period (rites de passage) are not only found in the Ciomas Banten community. This phenomenon also occurs in many places around the world. People from many cultures believe that in every transitional period of human life, there will always be hazardous situations to be encountered. Humans try to save themselves by carrying out ceremonies or rituals individually and collectively to avoid this hazard. According to some anthropologists, the ceremony functions as a means of announcing to the general public the level of life one has achieved (Koentjaraningrat, 1980: 89-90).

Conclusion

The various religious and *slametan* rituals of the Ciomas people above seem to be part of a religious ceremony that contains a meaning beyond just asking for salvation or glorifying God or the Prophet. If one observes the religious functions and meanings contained in various religious rituals and *slametan* rituals performed by the Ciomas community, it appears that these rituals show the presence of social functions that can strengthen the value of solidarity among community members. In addition, these rituals can also be interpreted as symbols of communication,

as well as collective human respect for God and other supernatural beings who are considered to have extraordinary powers that can ensure the survival of society. These rituals can also be interpreted as 'persuasion' or 'coaxing' of humans to God or certain supernatural beings to provide the local community protection, safety, and blessings.

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