



Jurnal Sastra Indonesia

<https://journal.unnes.ac.id/journals/jsi>



Acculturation of Javanese-Islamic Culture in the Tradition of Pitonan Babies in Wongsorejo Village, Banyuwangi: Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis

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Article Info

Article History

Submitted January 31, 2026

Accepted April 19, 2026

Publish April 30, 2026

Keyword

Baby Pitonan Tradition, Symbolic Meaning, Javanese-Islamic Acculturation, Semiotics, Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Abstract

The pitonan baby tradition is one of the birth rituals in Javanese culture that continues to be practiced from generation to generation and contains various symbols that represent the community's social, spiritual, and religious values. Over time, this tradition has undergone acculturation between Javanese culture and Islamic teachings, a process that occurs adaptively through the reinterpretation of traditional symbols. This study aims to analyze the symbolic meanings and forms of Javanese-Islamic cultural acculturation in the pitonan baby tradition in Wongsorejo Village, Banyuwangi, using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with an interpretative orientation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, participant observation of the implementation of the pitonan baby ritual, and visual documentation supported by field notes. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The interpretation of symbols was carried out through denotative, connotative, and mythological analyses to reveal ideological meanings within cultural practices. The findings indicate that symbols in the pitonan tradition, such as tujuh kulub, iwel-iwel, red and white jenang, nasi buceng, the ritual of stepping on jenang, and the object-selection procession, represent a dynamic process of Javanese-Islamic cultural acculturation. This acculturation process is characterized by three main forms: reinterpretation of symbolic meanings in elements such as tujuh kulub, jenang, and tumpeng; partial resistance to earlier belief elements found in iwel-iwel and the stepping-on-jenang ritual; and selective elimination of elements considered inconsistent with the value of tauhid, such as fortune-telling interpretations through object selection. In addition, the role of the kiai as an agent of cultural reinterpretation is significant in directing the transformation of symbolic meanings toward Islamic values. The pitonan baby tradition is no longer understood as a magical practice but rather as a medium of prayer, gratitude, and reinforcement of the value of tauhid within community life. This study contributes theoretically to the development of cultural semiotic studies and enhances understanding of symbolic negotiation processes within Javanese-Islamic cultural acculturation.

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DOI 10.15294/jsi.v15i1.42129

P ISSN: 2252-6315 E-ISSN: 2685-9599

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has cultural diversity reflected in the various ritual traditions that accompany the human life cycle, such as birth, marriage, and death. These traditions not only serve as cultural heritage but also as a medium for conveying social and religious values that are passed down from generation to generation. In Javanese society, ritual traditions generally contain symbols that represent the people's view of life and belief in the safety and blessings of life (Rahmadani & Pulungan, 2021).

One of the birth traditions that is still practiced today is the baby pitonan tradition, which is a ritual carried out when the baby is seven months old as a form of expression of gratitude and prayer for the baby's safety. Elements in the pitonan tradition, such as food offerings and ritual processions, contain symbols that are interpreted collectively by the supporting community. Therefore, the tradition of baby pitonan can be understood as a sign system that represents the hopes, moral values, and spiritual beliefs of the Javanese people (Ilham, 2022).

In its development, the pitonan tradition shows that there is an adaptive acculturation process between Javanese culture and Islamic teachings. This process does not remove elements of local culture, but reinterprets traditional symbols to be in harmony with Islamic values, such as prayer, gratitude, and tawakal to Allah SWT (Subqi, 2020). In Wongsorejo Village, Banyuwangi, the tradition of baby pitonan is still practiced and involves families, traditional leaders, and religious leaders. Ritual elements such as seven kulubs, red and white jenang, nasi buceng, and the procession of babies choosing objects are interpreted as symbols of prayer and hope for the future of children (Fauzi et al., 2025).

To understand the symbolic meaning in the tradition of baby pitons, a semiotic framework is used for analysis. Semiotics views culture as a system of signs whose meaning can be interpreted, not only at the literal level, but also at the cultural and ideological level (Ambarwati, 2020). Roland Barthes' approach to semiotics emphasizes three layers of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth, which allow researchers to uncover symbolic meaning more deeply in cultural practice (Muzzammil, 2023). Through this approach, traditional symbols in baby pitonan can be read as a medium of acculturation between Javanese culture and Islamic values (Sihombing et al., 2025).

Several previous studies have examined the pitonan tradition from various perspectives (Syahrin & Nurtikawati, 2021) emphasizing the symbolic meaning and social function of the piton-python ritual in strengthening the community's

cultural identity. Research (Septiari et al., 2024) It also reveals the philosophical values in the Pitonan tradition related to the harmony of life among the Javanese people.

Based on previous research, there is a gap: a lack of a study that comprehensively integrates Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis with the study of Javanese-Islamic cultural acculturation to understand the symbolic meaning of the baby pitonan tradition. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the symbols in the tradition of baby pitones through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to uncover the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings that represent the process of acculturation of Javanese-Islamic culture (Faris, 2016).

Based on this background, the formulation of the problem in this study is: (1) What is the denotative, connotative, and mythological meaning of symbols in the tradition of baby pitonan in Wongsorejo Village, Banyuwangi? (2) What is the form of acculturation of Javanese-Islamic culture reflected through symbols and ritual practices in the tradition of baby pitonan?

This study aims to analyze the symbolic meaning of the baby pitonan tradition through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach and reveal the form of acculturation of Javanese-Islamic culture reflected in the practice of the ritual (Muasmara & Ajmain, 2020).

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an interpretive orientation to understand the tradition of baby pitonan as a cultural phenomenon full of symbolic meaning in the life of the people of Wongsorejo Village, Banyuwangi (Utomo et al., 2022). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meanings, beliefs, and social practices of the community in depth and contextually, which cannot be measured quantitatively. This study views the tradition of baby pitonan as a cultural sign system that contains values, symbols, and ideologies, interpreted collectively by the supporting community.

The focus of this research is the baby pitonan ritual, including a series of processions, ritual symbols, social practices, and cultural meanings that develop in the community of Wongsorejo Village, Banyuwangi. The focus is on revealing the form of Javanese-Islamic cultural acculturation, reflected in symbols, prayers, and ritual practices in the implementation of baby pitonan (Indra & Lalu Muhammad Salikurrahman, 2024).

Data collection in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory

observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted semi-structuredly with key informants who had direct knowledge and experience of the implementation of the baby pitonan tradition. The informants of this study consisted of two people, namely Mbah Suparti (68 years old), a baby shaman who was directly involved in the implementation of the baby pitonan tradition, and Mr. Hudhori (57 years old), a traditional leader who understood cultural values and symbolic meanings in the baby pitonan tradition. The selection of informants is purposive, based on their roles, experiences, and cultural authority. The limited number of informants is considered, as the two informants are the main figures with authority and in-depth knowledge of the implementation of the baby pitonan tradition in Wongsorejo Village. Data is considered to have reached saturation (*data saturation*) when the information obtained from the interview shows a repeating pattern and no significant new information is found.

Observasi partisipatif dilakukan secara langsung in the implementation of the tradition of baby pitonan in Wongsorejo Village, as many as two baby pitonan activities, which will take place in 2025, with the duration of each activity being about 2-3 hours, starting from the preparation stage to the closing. The researcher was directly involved in observation activities to understand the series of ritual processions, social interactions, and the use of symbols in the baby pitonan tradition.

The interview *guide* is prepared in a semi-structured manner with a focus on several main aspects, namely: the stages of implementing the baby pitonan tradition, the symbolic meaning of each ritual element, changes or reinterpretations of traditions in the context of Islamic values, and people's views on the social and religious functions of the baby pitonan tradition. This interview guide allows researchers to dig deep into the data while maintaining consistency with the theme under study.

Documentation is carried out through photography and field recordings to reinforce visual and descriptive data relevant to the research focus. To maintain data validity, this study applies triangulation of sources and techniques, namely by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, this study adheres to research ethics by obtaining informed consent from all informants.

The data analysis in this study uses the Miles and Huberman qualitative data analysis model, which includes three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024).

Data reduction is carried out by selecting and focusing on data relevant to the symbols and ritual practices of baby pitonan. Furthermore, the data are presented in descriptive narratives and tables to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships among ritual elements.

At the meaning interpretation stage, this study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic approach with the following analysis steps: (1) Symbol identification, which is determining the ritual elements that function as signs, such as food, color, and ritual procession. (2) Denotative analysis, which is identifying the literal meaning or direct meaning of the symbols observed in ritual practices. (3) Connotative analysis, which is interpreting the cultural meaning and cultural values attached to symbols based on the understanding of the local community (Panji et al., 2023).

(4) Myth analysis, i.e., identifying ideological meanings that have been naturalized in cultural practices, such as collective beliefs that connect symbols with religious values in Islamic teachings (Talani et al., 2023). Through these stages, the symbols in the tradition of baby pitonan are systematically analyzed to reveal the form of acculturation of Javanese-Islamic culture (Ma'arif & Widadt, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Practice of the Baby Pitonan Tradition in Wongsorejo Village

Based on observations and interviews in Wongsorejo Village, Banyuwangi, the baby pitonan tradition is a selamatan ritual performed when the baby is 7 months old. In Javanese cosmology, the age of seven months is seen as an important phase in the human life cycle. The choice of seven months of age has a symbolic meaning because the number seven (seven) is interpreted as God's help or help. This meaning was also conveyed by the research informant, namely Mbah Suparti, who stated that the implementation of pitonan aims to help babies receive God's help in their lives (Mbah Suparti, interview, 2025).

In practice, the people of Wongsorejo Village understand pitonan not only as a biological time marker but also as a means of collective prayer and hope. The age of 7 months is considered a spiritual moment to ask for the baby's safety and blessings. In Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, meaning shifts from denotative meaning, a marker of age, to connotative meaning, a symbol of hope and spiritual protection (Suyitno et al., 2023).

The implementation of the baby pitonan tradition in Wongsorejo Village generally consists of three main stages: preparation, implementation,

and closure. At the preparation stage, the baby's family prepares various ritual equipment, including tumpeng complete with side dishes and vegetables, seven kulub, red and white jenang, and iwel-iwel. This preparation is usually carried out by female family members assisted by neighbors as a form of cooperation. In addition to preparing food, the family also determines the event date and invites religious leaders or kiai to lead prayers.

The implementation stage begins with an opening in the form of mauidhoh, or religious advice, delivered by the kiai. In this stage, the kiai leads the recitation of prayers of salvation for the baby and the family. After that, a symbolic procession was held, with a baby stepping on the red and white jenang and choosing several objects provided. In this process, the role of baby shamans is still visible, especially in guiding the symbolic procession and ensuring that the ritual sequence is carried out correctly according to the tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation (Afrida & Aryani, 2022).

Based on an interview with one of the informants, namely Mbah Suparti (68 years old), a baby shaman, it was explained that each stage of the ritual has a special meaning related to the baby's safety. He stated that:

"Jenang lan kulub iku ora mung panganan, nanging minangka sarana ndonga supaya bayi slamet lan ora kena gangguan. Wiwit jaman biyen, wong tuwa mesthi nindakake pitonan supaya anaké oleh pitulungan Gusti Allah." (Mbah Suparti, Interview, 2025)

The quote shows that people view ritual offerings not just as food but also as a means of prayer, believed to protect babies. This confirms that pitonan practice has a strong spiritual dimension in people's lives.

The closing stage involved distributing food to guests who attended as a form of alms and gratitude. This activity also strengthens social relations among community members. Based on an interview with Mr. Hudhori (57 years old), as a community leader, the pitonan tradition is seen as a means of strengthening social solidarity. He stated that:

"Pitonan bayi iku ora mung kanggo bayi, nanging uga kanggo ngumpulake warga. Kanthi kumpul lan ndonga bareng, hubungan antar warga dadi luwih raket." (Hudhori, Interview, 2025)

The entire series of baby pitonan processions was carried out in an atmosphere of togetherness

and strong religiosity, emphasizing the social and spiritual functions of the baby pitonan tradition as part of the life of the people of Wongsorejo Village.

Symbols and Meanings in the Baby Pitonan Ritual

The ritual of baby pitonan is understood as a system of cultural signs that collectively produce and convey social and religious meanings. Each element of the ritual serves as a sign that is not only literally meaningful but also imbued with cultural and ideological significance. Thus, baby pitonan can be read as a cultural text that represents the values, identity, and outlook of life of the Javanese people in the context of acculturation with Islam (Kariana, 2025).

Makna's mood wears out

In the Pitonan tradition, seven kulub or vegetable urap-urap denote the presentation of seven types of vegetables, prepared and distributed during the procession to save seven-month-old babies. This dish is an important part of a series of selamatan rituals involving families and the surrounding community (Indra & Lalu Muhammad Salikurrahman, 2024).

At the connotative level, seven kulub is interpreted as a symbol of protection (ngayomi) and hope for safety for babies. The number seven is culturally understood as a symbol of perfection and blessing in the Javanese tradition, and has a corresponding meaning in Islamic teachings, such as the concept of the seven layers of heaven, which symbolizes the perfection of God's creation (Noor & Anggraeni, 2025).

At the mythical level, the presentation of the seven kulub naturalizes the collective belief that the baby's safety must be realized through certain symbolic practices considered a natural and expected part of society. In Barthes' semiotic perspective, this practice shows how religious and cultural values are legitimized through food symbols, so that the pitonan tradition serves as an ideological medium that reinforces the belief that the safety of children depends not only on biological factors, but also on adherence to hereditary social traditions (Fauziyah et al., 2021).

Iwel-iwel

Iwel-iwel in the Pitonan tradition refers to a glutinous rice-based food served during the baby salutation procession as part of the ritual offering. At the connotative level, iwel-iwel is interpreted as a symbol of protection for babies against non-physical disorders believed to threaten children's safety. Within the framework of Javanese culture, glutinous rice foods are often associated with sticky

properties that symbolize symbolic attachment and protection to individuals.

At the mythical level, the presence of *iwel-iwel* naturalizes the belief that protecting babies requires special symbols passed down from generation to generation. This belief forms the collective ideology that the infant's safety depends not only on medical or physical care but also on adherence to sacred cultural practices. In this context, myths serve to strengthen the legitimacy of tradition as part of the value system of society, so that the practice of *pitonan* continues to be preserved as something that is considered right and natural in social life (Wulandari et al., 2024).

Jenang Merah and Jenang Putih

Jenang in the Pitonan tradition denotes traditional food in the form of porridge, which is served in two colors, namely red jenang and white jenang, as part of the baby salute procession. The white jenang is believed to have a function to resist disturbances from the west, while the red jenang is from the east. The presentation of the two colors of jenang is an important part of the series of baby *pitonan* rituals carried out by the community.

At the connotative level, red and white jenang are interpreted as symbols of rejecting *sengkolo*, or the disturbance of supernatural beings, as well as the origin of human life. The white color symbolizes the Prophet Adam or the father figure, while the red color symbolizes the Mother Eve or the mother figure. The variation in the arrangement of the red jenang with white in the middle, or vice versa, is interpreted as a symbol of the union of father and mother as the origin of the baby's life (Wafiqoh, 2019). In addition, red is culturally associated with the feminine, blood, and female biological processes, such as menstruation. It is often understood as a symbol of fertility and the sustainability of life in Javanese tradition.

At the mythical level, the red-and-white jenang symbol is not only interpreted as spiritual protection for babies but also naturalizes the collective belief that the balance of life and the safety of children must be realized through certain cultural symbols passed down from generation to generation. From the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotics, the symbolism of the colors red and white can also be read as a representation of the division of roles in the family, with women associated with biological and reproductive aspects, and men with the role of protector and guide. This symbolization process forms a natural understanding of the roles of men and women in the family, so that myths not only function as a medium of spiritual protection, but also as a means of reproducing social values regarding the role of

the family in Javanese-Islamic society. Meanwhile, the acculturation of Javanese-Islamic culture appears to align with the jenang symbol and the narrative of human creation in Islam, so that jenang functions as a medium for prayer, protection, and the strengthening of religiously legitimized family values.



Figure 1. Jenang Merah and Jenang Putih
(Researcher's personal documentation, 2025)

Sego Buceng (Tumpeng)

Sego buceng or tumpeng in the Pitonan tradition denotes a cone-shaped rice dish served in a series of baby *selamatan*. Tumpeng is arranged with side dishes and placed as the center of the dish in the *pitonan* ritual.

At the connotative level, the cone shape of the tumpeng is interpreted as a symbol of the vertical relationship between humans and God. The direction the top of the tumpeng faces symbolizes the hope of a straight, prosperous life and of always being guided by spiritual values. In Javanese culture, tumpeng is also interpreted as a symbol of the order of life and the balance between humans, nature, and transcendent forces (Dwi & Setyawan, 2024).

At the mythical level, the existence of tumpeng naturalizes the belief that gratitude to God must be manifested through food symbols in collective rituals. This practice shapes the understanding that a valid expression of gratitude is through *selamatan*, making the ritual a mandatory part of social life. In Barthes' perspective, this myth serves to strengthen religious values and social solidarity within the cultural system of Javanese-Islamic society.



Gambar 2. Nasi Buceng dalam Pitonan Bayi
(Dokumentasi pribadi peneliti, 2025)

Symbol of Baby Stepping on Red and White Jenang

The ritual of babies setting foot on the red and white jenang in the pitonan tradition denotes the symbolic procession carried out as part of the series of selamat for babies aged seven months. This procession is carried out by guiding the baby's feet onto the prepared jenang. At the cognitive level, this ritual is interpreted as a hope that the baby will not be pushed or forced by the scourge in his life journey, and that his steps will be steadfast as he faces life. The red and white jenang represent the duality of life, namely good and bad, that human beings will face from the beginning of their life (Sudarto, 2022).

At the mythical level, the procession of stepping on the jenang naturalizes the belief that a person's life journey must begin with certain symbolic rituals in order to gain protection. This practice holds that human life is inseparable from the influence of cultural symbols, so ritual performance is considered an important part of preparing children for the future. (Sartika et al., 2024).

Baby Choosing Object Symbol

The ritual of babies choosing several objects, such as money, books, combs, and snacks, is denoted as a symbolic procession in which the baby is directed to choose one of the objects provided in a series of pits.

At the connotative level, the choice of objects is interpreted as a symbol of parents' hopes for the child's future. Money symbolizes the hope of good sustenance, books symbolize science, combs symbolize neatness and morality, while snacks symbolize happiness and the ability to socialize.

At the mythical level, this ritual naturalizes the belief that an individual's life direction can be anticipated through cultural symbols from an early age. Although rationally a child's future is determined by a variety of social and educational factors, this symbolic practice forms a collective understanding that future expectations can be realized through traditional rituals that are passed down from generation to generation (Muchdor & Gufron, 2025).

A summary of the symbols and meanings in the baby pitonan ritual is presented in the following table.



Figure 3. Baby, when selecting an object
(Researcher's personal documentation, 2025)

Table 1. Symbols and Meanings in Symbols

No	Symbol	Denotative	Konotative	Myths
1	Tujuh Kulub	A seven-type vegetable dish	Symbols of protection (ngayomi) and blessings	The belief that the safety of the baby should be realized through traditional symbolic practices
2	Iwel-iwel	Glutinous rice foods	Symbol of spiritual protection	The belief that the protection of the baby requires a special ritual symbol
3	Jenang Merah and Jenang Putih	Jenang dish with two colors	Symbol of the origin of life and the rejection of sengkolo	Naturalization of the role of family and fertility as the basis of life
4	Nasi Buceng (Tumpeng)	Cone-shaped rice dish	Symbol of man's vertical relationship with God	Keyakinan bahwa awal ras syukur diwujudkan melalui ritual kolektif
5	Baby Stepping Jenang Merah and Putih	Procession of babies stepping on the jenang	A symbol of steadfastness, life steps, and readiness to face the dualities of life	The belief that symbolic rituals should accompany the beginning of life

6	Baby Choosing Objects Ritual	Baby chooses objects such as money, books, combs, or snacks	Overview of the child's interests and future expectations	The belief that the future can be predicted through cultural symbols
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Table 1 summarizes the symbolic analysis of the tradition of baby pitonan by showing the relationships among ritual symbols, denotative meanings, connotative meanings, and myths, to help understand the values of protection, prayer, and hope in the socio-cultural context.

Acculturation of Javanese-Islamic Culture in Symbols and Ritual Practices

The acculturation of Javanese-Islamic culture in the tradition of baby pitonan does not take place as a raw acceptance of all elements of Javanese culture, but through a process of negotiation, reinterpretation, and even resistance to elements

that are considered contrary to the value of monotheism (Yahya et al., 2022). Based on interviews with Mbah Suparti (baby shaman) and Mr. Hudhori (traditional leader), as well as participatory observation of ritual implementation, this study finds that not all Javanese symbols are preserved intact. Some elements have changed their meaning, some have been deliberately eliminated or replaced with Islamic practices.

Table 2 summarizes the forms of acculturation that occur, which are then explained narratively in the next section.

Table 2. Forms of Javanese-Islamic Acculturation in Pitonan

No.	Symbol	Elements of Javanese Culture	Elements of Islamic Values	Forms of Acculturation
1	Tujuh Kulub	The number seven as a symbol of perfection	Prayer of salvation (two), tawakal, and acknowledgment of the authority of Allah SWT	Traditional Javanese symbols are combined with Islamic prayers; The safety of the baby is understood as the result of the efforts and will of Allah SWT
2	Iwel-iwel	Belief in the need to reject non-physical disorders in babies	Prayers, tawakal, and requests for protection to Allah SWT	Local beliefs cannot be eliminated, but are interpreted as spiritual endeavors that come from Allah SWT
3	Jenang Merah and Jenang Putih	Symbol of balance of the origin of life and the rejection of sengkolo	The narrative of the human creator (Adam and Eve) and family values	The color and arrangement of jenang are reinterpreted in Islamic frameworks as a symbol of the union of father and mother
4	Nasi Buceng (Tumpeng)	Mountains as a symbol of protection and well-being of life	The concept of man's vertical relationship with God and gratitude	Tumpeng is a symbolic medium of gratitude to Allah SWT for the trust of a child
5	Ritual of Stepping on Red and White Jenang	Belief that the baby is not pushed into his life	Belief that the salvation of life is in the will of Allah SWT	Ritual serves as a symbol of prayer and effort, not a determinant of destiny
6	Baby Choosing Objects Ritual	Symbolic interpretation of the child's interests and future	The concept of destiny and parental responsibility in Islam	Tradition is understood as prayer and hope, not absolute prophecy

The Seven Clubs: The Negotiation between the Javanese Sacred Numbers and Tawheed

In Javanese culture, the number seven in seven kulub is interpreted as a symbol of perfection and protection (*pitulungan*). In the practice of pitonan in Wongsorejo Village, this meaning is not eliminated. However, it is reinterpreted through

the insertion of Islamic prayers before and after the division of the seven clubs. According to Mr. Hudhori, people no longer believe that the number seven has magical powers, but rather understand it as a "reminder" that perfection belongs only to Allah. Thus, there is a negotiation between local beliefs and monotheism: simbol dipertahankan,

tetapi his spiritual authority was transferred to God (Roszi & Mutia, 2018).

Iwel-iwel: Partial Resistance to Occult Beliefs

Iwel-iwel is traditionally used as a repellent against the disturbance of *baby batur* (spirit creatures that disturb babies). In an interview, Mbah Suparti admitted that the belief in *baby batur* is still alive among the older generation. However, in the current ritual implementation, there is partial resistance to these elements. Local religious leaders expressly stated that no creature could disturb a baby without Allah's permission. Consequently, the prayers recited when offering iwel-iwel are no longer intended to "expel away" spirit beings, but rather as a general request for protection from Allah.

Jenang Merah y Putih: Reinterpretation of Javanese Genealogy into Islamic Narrative

In Javanese cosmology, the red and white jenang symbolize Mother Eve (red) and the Prophet Adam (white), as well as the rejection of *sengkolo* from the east and west. This study found that the Wongsorejo people do not retain the literal meaning of rejecting *sengkolo*. Instead, there was a complete reinterpretation facilitated by the local kiai: the red-white color is now interpreted as a symbol of the unity of father and mother as the origin of infant life, which is then linked to the Qur'anic verse about the creation of humans in pairs (QS. Az-Zariyat: 49). The element of "east-west direction" as a source of disturbance is explicitly omitted because it is considered to have no basis in Islamic teachings.

Nasi Buceng (Tumpeng): From the Symbol of the Mountain to the Media of Gratitude

In ancient Javanese tradition, the mountain-shaped tumpeng symbolizes protection (*mayungi*) and the well-being of life that comes from the forces of nature. In the practice of pitonan in Wongsorejo, this meaning has undergone a fundamental shift. Based on Mr. Hudhori's narration, tumpeng is no longer interpreted as a symbol of a mystical mountain, but as a medium of gratitude to Allah for the child's trust. The local kiai explains the shape of the cone pointing upwards as a representation of *inna lillahi wa inna ilaihi raji'un* (we come from Allah and return to Him).

The Ritual of Stepping on Jenang: From Pushing Back to Being a Symbol of Effort

The ritual of babies stepping on red and white jenang is traditionally intended to ensure that babies are "not pushed by *sengkolo*" throughout their lives. This study found that younger

generations and religious leaders did not maintain the ritual's rejection of reinforcements. Mbah Suparti admitted that, currently, the ritual of stepping on jenang is more commonly understood as a "symbolic exercise" for babies to walk through life, rather than as a means of expelling evil forces. The local kiai actively resisted magical interpretations by asserting that "no *sengkolo* can be encouraged with jenang". This ritual survived as a cultural practice, but its meaning shifted to a symbol of prayer and parental efforts.

Baby Choosing Objects Ritual: From Prophecy to Hope

The ritual of babies choosing objects (money, books, combs, snacks) is traditionally interpreted as a prophecy about the child's future. This element most clearly shows the resistance of religious figures because it is contrary to the concept of destiny in Islam (no one knows the future except Allah). Based on the interview, Mr. Hudhori explained that the people of Wongsorejo no longer believe that the choice of objects determines fate. The local kiai expressly clarified that this ritual is merely a "symbolic game" that serves as a medium for parents' prayer and hope, not prophecy. In fact, families no longer include the ritual of babies choosing objects in the series of pitonan traditions as a form of adjustment to the growing religious understanding.

The Role of Kiai in the Acculturation Process

Based on field findings, the acculturation of Javanese-Islamic culture into the tradition of baby pitonan in Wongsorejo Village did not occur spontaneously or mechanically. Religious leaders (kiai) and traditional leaders have an active role as agents of reinterpretation. In each implementation of pitonan, the kiai does not just "recite prayers", but also gives *mauidhoh* (short lectures) that explain the limits of the sharia.

Mr. Hudhori emphasized this as a traditional leader in an interview:

"Kiai itu tidak hanya datang, baca doa, terus pulang. Beliau selalu memberi pengarahan dulu sebelum acara dimulai. Misalnya, bilang, 'Bapak-bapak, Ibu-ibu, ini jenang, ini tumpeng, tidak usah diyakini ada kekuatannya sendiri. Yang kuasa hanya Allah. Kita berdoa minta selamat, itu yang penting.' Masyarakat jadi paham kalau dulu mungkin agak percaya mitos; sekarang sudah berubah." (Interview with Bapak Hudhori, 2025)

The statement shows that the kiai plays the role of cultural interpreters, actively preventing the

potential for deviant meanings (shirk) in ritual symbols. The local kiai explicitly forbade the belief that offerings have magical powers, and emphasized that salvation prayers should only be addressed to Allah SWT.

Mbah Suparti, as a baby shaman, also admitted the change in understanding:

"Dulu waktu saya muda, orang tua bilang jenang merah itu untuk penolak bala dari timur, jenang putih dari barat. Tapi sekarang Kiai Haji sering mengingatkan bahwa yang bisa menolak bala hanya Allah. Jadi saya juga ikut-ikutan bilang ke warga, 'Jenang ini hanya simbol, yang penting niat dan doanya.' Wong sekarang sudah tidak percaya begitu-begitunya, kecuali yang benar-benar tua dan belum paham." (Interview with Mbah Suparti, 2025)

Mr. Hudhori explained that the role of the kiai is crucial in preventing the practice of shirk that may arise from the literal meanings of Javanese symbols. In some cases, Kiai even recommends replacing terms or offering materials that are considered problematic. However, there is no open conflict between the kiai and the community because the approach is persuasive and adaptive rather than confrontational.

"Tidak pernah ada pertentangan keras karena Kiai Haji cara menyampaikannya halus. Beliau tidak pernah bilang, 'Itu haram, jangan dilakukan.' Tapi bilang, 'Sebaiknya seperti ini, biar selamat dunia akhirat.' Jadi masyarakat mau-mau saja." (Interview with Bapak Hudhori, 2025)

This shows that Javanese-Islamic acculturation in Wongsorejo results from ongoing negotiations between religious authorities and local traditions, rather than mere passive acceptance. The role of the kiai is not confrontational, but adaptive and persuasive, so that the tradition remains sustainable, but the meaning shifts in a direction that is more in accordance with the values of monotheism (Fistalita et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the acculturation of Javanese-Islamic culture in the tradition of baby pitonan in Wongsorejo Village is not passive syncretic, but dynamic and dialogical, characterized by three main forms: reinterpretation (in the seven kulubs, jenang, and tumpeng), partial resistance (in iwel-iwel and the ritual of stepping on jenang), and selective elimination (in the ritual of choosing

objects). Elements that are contrary to monotheism, such as claims of prophecy and magical powers, are eliminated or neutralized through the active role of the kiai as agents of reinterpretation. This tradition serves as a moderate cultural-religious practice in which local symbols are retained as markers of identity, while their meanings align with Islamic values.

This study has four limitations: (1) the number of informants is limited (two people); (2) only using Barthes semiotics without comparison with other models; (3) is synchronous, does not track changes in meaning over a long period of time; (4) The location is limited to one village, so it cannot be generalized.

Theoretically, this study proposes three forms of acculturation (reinterpretation, partial resistance, and selective elimination) that go beyond the descriptive syncretism model and introduce the concept of "symbolic negotiation" as an acculturation mechanism in which the spiritual authority of symbols is consciously transferred to God. Practically, these findings can be used by religious leaders for a persuasive-adaptive approach, by traditional leaders to preserve traditions without shirk, and by village governments to compile cultural documentation based on new meanings.

Future research suggests expanding the number and variety of informants, adopting a comparative semiotic approach, conducting diachronic studies, and extending the study to other villages to test the generalizability of the findings.

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