

Fostering Dialogue, Tolerance, and Religious Harmony in Indonesia through the Local Tradition of ‘Bersih Desa’

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Abstract

This study elucidates the purpose and practices of the Sukodadi *bersih desa* tradition as a means of fostering dialogue and strengthening tolerance and harmony among religious communities. The researcher employs ethnography with a thick descriptive approach to interpret the meaning and explain the behavior of the *bersih desa* tradition as it unfolds. The research was conducted over four months, beginning before the tradition was practiced and ending after it was completed. The researcher interviewed village officials, interfaith leaders, cultural activists, and community members. This research aligns with Pierre Bourdieu’s theory that the *bersih desa* tradition serves as social capital in creating a path for interfaith dialogue without any party dominating, as stakeholders and social structures play equal and interdependent roles. Interreligious dialogue through the *bersih desa* tradition involves environmental cleansing, offerings at sacred sites, interfaith prayers, processions with mountain-shaped structures, and *wayang* performances. Its essence is to connect with God, ancestors, fellow humans, and nature. This practice strengthens its adherents while fostering the idea of shared ownership, as per Clifford Geertz’s theory, through religious rituals, art, and culture. Its contributions lie in strengthening tolerance and harmony among religious communities by forming emotional bonds and eliminating religious symbols.

Keywords: Local wisdom, bersih desa, dialogue, tolerance, interfaith harmony

Introduction

One of the key challenges faced by governments worldwide, including that of countries in Southeast Asia, is managing diversity, citizenship, and religious complexity.¹ In the context of anthropology, the concept of a pluralistic society is important. This is evident in the characterization of the Dutch East Indies society, where various social orders of life can coexist with the same perspective, and the market serves as a unifying social arena.² The coexistence of diverse groups in a pluralistic society reflects harmonious coexistence within a diverse population. Zou’an indicated that one means of achieving harmonious coexistence, particularly within religious communities, is through dialogue and collaboration.

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¹ Charlene Tan, “Creating ‘Good Citizens’ and Maintaining Religious Harmony in Singapore,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 30, no. 2 (2008): 133–42.

² John Sydenham Furnivall, *Netherlands Indie: A Study of Plural Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 1939), 446.

His perspective is reinforced by Ismail's insights into Mukti Ali's concept of dialogue, which entails constructive engagement with supporting and opposing perspectives to foster interreligious harmony. The dialogue referenced in Rohmawati's work pertains to the capacity to negotiate.³

Dialogue aimed at fostering interreligious harmony does not necessarily require direct communication. Conversely, indirect communication channels, such as cultural, ethnic, and local wisdom, can be more impactful. This type of communication is also referred to as a communication accommodation strategy.

The theory of communication accommodation is based on the work of Howard Giles, who posits that individuals communicate by adjusting their style of communication, as well as contemplating the motivation and consequences.⁴ Samovar's model identifies two key elements of communication accommodation: competence and indirect communication.⁵ Communication accommodation through local wisdom serves as a conduit to bridge the divide between religion and culture. It facilitates the elimination of stereotypes, ethnocentrism, and conflict.

This study examines the role of local wisdom in Sukodadi's flagship *bersih desa* program, specifically in fostering dialogue, tolerance, and harmony among religious communities in Malang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Previous research has divided local wisdom into three categories relevant to this context.

First, ritual-based wisdom is observed in the work of Dewa Agung, with practices such as *nyadran*, *tingkeban*, *mitoni*, *petik pari*, *tandur ritual*, *Dewi Sri*, *Sri Kunci*, and *Sri Manis*, collectively referred to as *selamatan*.⁶ Second, wisdom as a norm of life is exemplified by *menyama braya*, a principle that unites Hindus and Muslims among indigenous Balinese, fostering interreligious harmony⁷ and creating interreligious harmony.⁸ Third, wisdom in the form of art, such as *wayang*, *jaran kepeng*, and *karawitan*, unites and harmonizes religious communities.⁹

³ Wang Zuo'an, "Religious Harmony: A Fresh Concept in the Age of Globalization," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 77, no. 1 (2013): 210–13; Wiwin S.A. Rohmawati, "The Role of Women in Interreligious Dialogue in Indonesia: A Study on the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB)," *The Muslim World* 110, no. 4 (2020): 572–88; Faisal Ismail, "Paving the Way for Interreligious Dialogue, Tolerance, and Harmony: Following Mukti Ali's Path," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 50, no. 1 (2012): 147–78.

⁴ Howard Giles, "Communication Accommodation Theory," in *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives*, ed. L. A. Baxter & D. O. Braithwaite (Sage Publications, Inc., 2008), 161-173.

⁵ Larry A. Samovar et al., *Communication Between Cultures 9th Edition* (Cengage Learning, 2017); Bherta Sri Eko and Hendar Putranto, "The Role of Intercultural Competence and Local Wisdom in Building Intercultural and Inter-Religious Tolerance," *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 48, no. 4 (2019): 341–369.

⁶ Dewa Agung Gede Agung et al., "Local Wisdom as a Model of Interfaith Communication in Creating Religious Harmony in Indonesia," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 9, no 1 (2024): 1-11; Jochem Van den Boogert, "The Role of Slametan in the Discourse on Javanese Islam," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 45, no. 133 (2017): 352–72.

⁷ Rahmat Hidayatullah et al., "The Social Integration of Hindu and Muslim Communities: The Practice of 'Menyama-Braya' in Contemporary Bali," *Studia Islamika* 28, no. 1 (2021): 149–78; Moch Khafidz Fuad Raya et al., "Menyama Braya: Balinese Hindu-Muslim Ethnoreligious Construction in the Creation of Peace Education," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2023): 2237289.

⁸ I Nengah Lestawi and I Made Wirahadi Kusuma, "Menyama Braya: The Roots of Religious Moderation In Singaraja Bali," *Anubhava: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Hindu* 3, no. 2 (2023): 464–73.

⁹ Eko and Putranto, "The Role of Intercultural Competence and Local Wisdom in Building Intercultural and Inter-Religious Tolerance" 341–369; Hartono, Wenti Nuryani, and Eny Kusumastuti, "Javanese Art Conservation in Indonesia Inheriting Potentials of Local Wisdom through Wayang Wong Bocah," *Research in Dance Education* 25, no. 2 (2024): 234–249.

The tradition of *bersih desa* village is closely associated with *selamatan* and communal prayers dedicated to ancestors and *danyang*,¹⁰ serving as a form of cultural and religious integration. As with the practice of *bersih desa* in three villages in Blitar District, it takes the form of a *selamatan*, which comprises communal prayers by the majority religion, packaged in the *baritan* tradition, accompanied by the serving of a Blitar specialty, *takir plontang*.¹¹ Meanwhile, another study describes the tradition of *bersih desa* in the form of a traditional *ceprotan* ceremony in addition to *selamatan* in the village of Sekar, Pacitan Regency.¹²

There are also traditions similar to *bersih desa* in other countries—the *o-bon* tradition in Japan and *bunbangfai* in Thailand. *O-bon* is an annual tradition among the Japanese people, serving as a means of communication with their ancestors and families by visiting graves and offering gifts to them.¹³ The *bunbangfai* tradition is a community ritual in the form of a rocket festival centered in Eastern Thailand, which aims to invoke the forces of nature from the sky or the gods, praying for a bountiful harvest.¹⁴

Unlike previous studies, *bersih desa* explores local wisdom in new ways. It looks at rituals, artistic expressions, culture, and social norms. These norms can be integrated into village government flagship programs. This approach may create space for dialogue, tolerance, and social cohesion by uniting elements of rituals, norms, and art in community life. Therefore, this tradition requires deeper exploration, as these dimensions have not been the focus of previous studies.

Method

This research was conducted in Sukodadi village, Wagir Subdistrict, Malang, Indonesia. The population composition was as follows: Islam—67% (3353); Hinduism—29% (1430); Christianity—3% (173); Catholicism—1% (48); and Buddhism—0% (10). This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach utilizing ethnographic methods to examine the local wisdom and traditions associated with the *bersih desa* tradition on the slopes of Mount Kawi.

The ethnography research method employs a cultural perspective to examine the lived experiences of individuals and communities, particularly in terms of their cultural expressions.¹⁵ This study investigated the underlying motives, patterns, and practices associated with the cultural and religious rituals observed in *bersih desa*. It aimed to gain insight into how culture could facilitate dialogue, tolerance, and harmony between religious communities.

For data collection, this study employed a range of methods, including in-depth open-ended and structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. The

¹⁰ Mutiara, "Tradisi Lokal Bersih Desa Sebagai Perwujudan Nilai Sosial Di Desa Rantau Rasau," *Krinok: Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah Dan Sejarah* 2, no. 2 (2023): 160–168; Asiyah Asiyah and Alimni Alimni, "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Islam Dalam Tradisi Bersih Desa Di Purbosari Kecamatan Seluma Barat Kabupaten Seluma," *Manhaj: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengabdian Masyarakat* 8, no. 2 (2019): 135–145.

¹¹ Arik Cahyani, Afry Adi Chandra, and Andi Nur Oktafiana, "Manifestation Of Religious Communities And Implementation Of Pancasila Values In The 'Bersih Desa' Tradition Of Muharram Month In Blitar," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 21, no. 2 (2023): 469–92.

¹² Laras Andita Yuningtyas, Sigit Pranawa, and Yuhastina Yuhastina, "The Meaning of the Ceprotan Tradition in Bersih Desa for the People of Sekar Village," *Harmoni Sosial: Jurnal Pendidikan IPS* 7, no. 2 (2020): 150–59.

¹³ Ensho Ashikaga, "The Festival for the Spirits of the Dead in Japan," *Western Folklore* 9, no. 3 (1950): 217–228.

¹⁴ Stanley Jeyaraja. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*, ed. Jack Goody, First (Cambridge University Press, 1970), 285.

¹⁵ Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, "Ethnography and Participant Observation," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage Publications, Inc., 1994), 248.

informants for this research included representatives from the village government, interfaith leaders, village culturists, and the community. This study employed a descriptive approach to cultural interpretation¹⁶ to analyze the data, commencing with the initial stages of the research process concerning the *bersih desa* tradition and continuing through the culmination of ritual practices.

Furthermore, the empirical data were interpreted by incorporating creative and meticulous insights. Additionally, a reflection was carried out on the empirical data by articulating meaning in a descriptive manner and confirming the data to ensure that the results of the data analysis aligned with reality. Data analysis entailed an interactive approach—collecting, displaying, and condensing data and drawing conclusions.¹⁷

Results and Discussion

Meaning and Purpose of The Hereditary Bersih Desa Tradition

In general, *bersih desa* is defined as a *selamatan* activity in the form of a Javanese traditional ritual that has been passed down from one generation to another, connecting humans with nature,¹⁸ in the form of an annual ritual held in the month of *selo* (Javanese) between the months of *zulkaidah* or *syawal*.¹⁹ Meanwhile, an annual ritual that has cosmological and spiritual values similar to the *bersih desa* tradition is the *o-bon* festival in Japan, which is a syncretism of traditions passed down from generation to generation, involving lighting lanterns, dancing *bon odori*, and cleaning graves as a form of respect and spiritual purification.²⁰ In Thailand, the *bunbangfai* festival is a community tradition of launching rockets into the sky as a form of prayer to the sky god for rain, symbolizing respect for the forces of nature and efforts to maintain harmony between humans and the universe.²¹ These three traditions reflect the community's belief in the importance of maintaining balance among humans, ancestors, and nature as an integral part of its sustainability.

An interesting and distinctive feature of the *bersih desa* tradition in Sukodadi Village, Malang Regency, compared with similar traditions in other areas, is the involvement of the village government. This ritual is not only the responsibility of the community; the village head also plays an initiating role in fostering creativity when implementing the activities. Local leadership adds a new dimension to the preservation of traditions by fostering harmony among religious communities. The following is the Village Head's opinion regarding the implementation of *bersih desa* in his area:

bersih desa existed before I took office with community involvement but not as it is today. I started interfaith prayers in 2015. I took office in 2013; in 2014, there was almost a breakup because the place of worship did not meet the minimum requirements. I saw that the community here was diverse, so I took over the *bersih desa*. I initiated interfaith prayers at the village hall through *bersih desa* since 2015 by approaching religious and community leaders. We do this every year from the end of the big month until the beginning of the month of Suro (Muharram) on July 8.²²

¹⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 10.

¹⁷ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 4th ed. (SAGE Publications Inc., 2018), 74.

¹⁸ Depdikbud, *Kamus Bahasa Indonesia* (Balai Pustaka, 1991), 56; Nurul Badriyah Khomsah, "Tradisi Bersih Desa Dalam Pandangan Dakwah Islam (Studi Di Desa Sidodadi Kecamatan Padasuka Kabaupaten Pringsewu)" (UIN Raden Intan Lampung, 2019), 71.

¹⁹ Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan Jawa* (Balai Pustaka, 1984), 343.

²⁰ Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 10.

²¹ Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*, 286.

²² Susilo Wahyudi Interview, "History of Bersih Desa in Sukodadi Village" (Malang Regency, 2024).

This opinion explains why the tradition of *bersih desa* has been carried out by the people of Sukodadi Village for generations, but its function has evolved into a means of interfaith dialogue through prayer. The village government became the initiator and facilitator of interfaith prayer in the tradition of *bersih desa*. The interfaith prayer activity helped quell the conflict between religious communities that had almost erupted in 2014 over the establishment of a place of worship. The implementation of this tradition varies in the month of Suro (Muharram)—a month of the *tolak balak*, although some interpret it differently. In Javanese Islam, it is a sacred month to evaluate and draw closer to Allah.²³ Essentially, the month of Suro is the right time to ask for goodness and be kept away from evil, which is reflected in the tradition of *bersih desa* and passed down from generation to generation.

However, amid the spirit of preserving the noble values of the *bersih desa* tradition, many oppose it on religious grounds. One such group is the puritanical Islamists, who often reject cultural and religious acculturation.²⁴ Specifically, there is no such rejection, but the strengthening of conservative groups in Indonesia does not rule out the possibility of rejection, as evidenced by events in Lumajang district near Malang. In 2022, a group sabotaged a similar tradition, *bersih desa*, by throwing and kicking offerings.²⁵

A similar rejection was also conducted by a puritanical Islamic group against the ancestral prayer ritual of the *Padma Buana* community in Bantul, Yogyakarta, through the practice of syncretism between Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Javanese culture at a place of worship. This triggered rejection by some residents and led to a conflict that peaked in November 2019, which was also suspected to be related to the distribution of authority in cultural tourism management.²⁶

Nevertheless, the younger generation, exposed to cultural digitalization and modernization, has lost interest in preserving traditions and considers them outdated and useless practices.²⁷ Consequently, the collective and spiritual values that ideally underpin the *bersih desa* tradition have been eroded by the skeptical and pragmatic attitudes of contemporary society.²⁸ However, amid these dynamics, several academics and cultural figures continue to preserve the tradition from its spiritual and social dimensions. A professor of Javanese Literature and Anthropology at Yogyakarta State University explained that the essence of the *bersih desa* tradition includes spiritual aspects, expressed as gratitude to God for the community's harvest.

Second, it is a form of supplication to the *danyang* or guardian of the village to always provide protection. *Third*, it is a request for God's help in providing a bountiful harvest in the next season. *Fourth*, it is a means of strengthening community solidarity in the spirit of unity and brotherhood.²⁹ *Fifth*, other terms for *bersih desa*, such as *merti desa*, also contain the meaning of a request to God to protect the earth from danger and disaster.³⁰ The village head and residents have their opinions about the purpose of *bersih desa*.

²³ Muhammad Sholikhin, *Misteri Bulan Suro Prespektif Islam Jawa* (Narasai, 2010), 277.

²⁴ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 30.

²⁵ Bagus Supriadi and Achmad Faizal, "Duduk Perkara Pria Tendang Dan Buang Sesajen Di Lumajang Hingga Terancam Jerat Pidana," *Kompas*, Januari 01, 2022.

²⁶ Setyo Boedi Oetomo, "Konflik Penolakan Ritual Doa Leluhur Paguyuban Padma Buana Di Pedukuhan Mangir Bantul, Yogyakarta," *Jurnal SMART (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, Dan Tradisi)* 6, no. 1 (2020): 49–62.

²⁷ Ariel Heryanto, "Pop Culture and Competing Identities," in *Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics* (Routledge, 2008), 29.

²⁸ Matthew Festenstein, "Spotlight: Pragmatism in Contemporary Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 22, no. 4 (October 1, 2023): 629–46.

²⁹ Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan Jawa*, 344; Suwardi Endraswara, "Mistisisme Dalam Seni Spiritual Bersih Desa Di Kalangan Penghayat Kepercayaan," *Kejawe: Jurnal Kebudayaan Jawa* 1, no. 2 (2006): 38–62.

³⁰ Sri Wintala Achmad, *Asal-Usul & Sejarah Orang Jawa* (Araska, 2017), 145.

Personally, when I first became the leader of the village, I noticed that the community was diverse, so I initiated a joint prayer. Subsequently, we invited the community and religious leaders to respond to interfaith prayer activities in the tradition of *bersih desa*. The goal was to enable communication among residents of different faiths. Through prayer, spiritual communication indirectly took place because we shared the same goal, while directly, through the village committee that I formed, people of different faiths were able to communicate to make the joint program a success.³¹

Residents' opinions about the purpose of *bersih desa*.

Thus, the goal of the *bersih desa* tradition is for the community to interact and be able to talk and mingle with one another in the absence of village programs. On religious missions, people of the same religion interact during worship. But when it comes to interfaith issues, we can work together toward the same mission of preserving traditions and living in harmony. The main driving force is the village government, led by a committee comprising Islamic, Hindu, and Christian members. Therefore, the most prominent interaction is the *bersih desa*.³²

The residents of Sukodadi Village believe that *bersih desa* encourages interaction among religious communities to preserve traditions and maintaining peaceful coexistence through a committee system that accommodates interfaith communities for ongoing interaction. Interfaith prayers in the tradition of *bersih desa* become the social capital of the community in establishing interfaith dialogue. The Sukodadi village government, as a stakeholder, and religious and community leaders, as social structures, have the same role in realizing interfaith dialogue through the tradition of *bersih desa* as a guide. No one dominates the role of interfaith dialogue, as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital suggests. There is no dichotomy between stakeholders and social structures in social relations; individuals and groups are interdependent within social networks.³³

Creating Interfaith Dialogue through the Traditional Ceremony of Bersih Desa

The *bersih desa* ceremony blends government, community, religion, and local culture, creating social and spiritual solidarity that lasts one day and one night. The morning starts with a village clean-up. In the afternoon, each family delivers food, signaled by the village head beating a *kentongan* (wooden drum).³⁴ The climax is a communal prayer in Javanese, with *sesaji* offerings at the four village corners to honor the *danyang* or guardian spirits.³⁵ The ritual closes with a *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) performance that conveys unity and moral values, such as *Bharatayuda*, *Wahyu Gada Inten*, and *Wahyu Purbasejati*.³⁶ Conversely, the *bersih desa* ceremony examined in this study features a distinctly different form, unique interpretations, and particular community responses, setting it apart from the standard practice.

The *bersih desa* activity was designed by myself and the committee, in collaboration with religious and community leaders, as well as representatives from the wider community. The three days of implementation are not continuous; rather,

³¹ Susilo Wahyudi Interview, "The Aim of The Bersih Desa Tradition in Sukodadi Village" (Malang Regency, 2024).

³² (Interview Shodikin, 2024a)

³³ Gede Agung et al., "Local Wisdom as a Model of Interfaith Communication in Creating Religious Harmony in Indonesia," 1-11; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press, 1984), 482.

³⁴ Suwardi, "Mistisisme Dalam Seni Spiritual Bersih Desa Di Kalangan Penghayat Kepercayaan," 38-62.

³⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (University of Chicago Press, 1960), 69.

³⁶ Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan Jawa 287-288*; Suwardi, "Mistisisme Dalam Seni Spiritual Bersih Desa Di Kalangan Penghayat Kepercayaan," 38-62.

they are scheduled to occur on the appropriate date within the Javanese calendar. This sets it apart from the *bersih desa* practice in other villages. The series of events is structured around three core principles: mutual cooperation; remembering the divine, ancestors, nature, and others; and preserving art and caring for culture. The inaugural event is scheduled to commence on Friday *legi*, June 28th, with the communal feast (*barikan or selamatan*). Meanwhile, the neighborhood cleaning activity is held prior to the communal feast. Subsequently, a community service is conducted on the second day to clean the surrounding environment. This is followed by a joint interfaith prayer on July 7, which marks the beginning of the month of *Suro*. The prayer is held at the village hall, which is not a place of worship. The prayer is performed according to this schedule: morning to noon for Christians, afternoon for Hindus, and evening for Muslims. The third day, July 8, concluded with a parade of *tumpeng or arak-arakan gunung* (piles of harvest) in the morning and a wayang kulit performance in the evening at the village hall.³⁷

Clarify the village head's opinion on the essence and experience of implementing *barikan* during the *bersih desa* ceremony.

During the *barikan* ceremony, we bring food to the *punden* to pray for our ancestors. Moreover, the *barikan* is an expression of gratitude to God for the blessings and gifts He has given us. All equipment used, from food to food containers, comes from natural resources (plants) such as banana stems and leaves. The philosophy is that humans will eventually return to unite with nature. Later, the community exchanges food, meaning that after praying, everyone consumed the food brought by others as a symbol of togetherness and solidarity. The prayer leader, a Muslim representative, uses Javanese because it is the majority language. We have no issue with them leading the prayer because they are the majority, including myself, a Christian.³⁸

The *bersih desa* traditions in Sukodadi demonstrate a harmonious blend of cultural and religious values. There are four stages and important meanings for its implementation. The first stage entails cleaning the surrounding environment and *barikan*. The activity begins with cleaning the environment as a symbol of cooperation and a medium of communication between religious communities.³⁹ Meanwhile, *barikan* is performed to establish indirect communication with ancestors.

As shown in Figure 1, the community performs *barikan* in the courtyard of the *punden* as a form of respect for ancestors and an expression of gratitude to God through collective prayer. Furthermore, the community sits in rows on the left and right sides of the banana leaves used as a food tray, reflecting harmony with nature and simplicity of life. After the prayer, food is exchanged with the rule of not taking food brought by oneself as a symbol of togetherness and eliminating individual ego.⁴⁰

³⁷ Susilo Wahyudi Interview, "The Relationship Between Religion and Culture at Tradition of Bersih Desa in Sukodadi Village" (Malang Regency, 2024).

³⁸ Interview Andik, "The Relationship Between Religion and Culture at Tradition of Bersih Desa in Sukodadi Village" (Malang Regency, 2024).

³⁹ Suwardi, "Mistisisme Dalam Seni Spiritual Bersih Desa Di Kalangan Penghayat Kepercayaan," 38-62.

⁴⁰ Khomsah, "Tradisi Bersih Desa Dalam Pandangan Dakwah Islam (Studi Di Desa Sidodadi Kecamatan Padasuka Kabaupaten Pringsewu),"76.

Figure 1: People in the *punden* area are praying together



Meanwhile, in Figure 2, the village head gives a speech at the *barikan* ceremony at the *punden* as a symbol of the initiator of the activity, concern for preserving culture, and maintaining local wisdom without being hindered by differences in faith. This activity is symbolic and serves as a space for social and spiritual interaction among residents.⁴¹

Figure 2: The village head is speaking during a joint prayer at the *punden*



This tradition serves as a spiritual and social space in which the values of togetherness, tolerance, and local wisdom coexist in harmony. In Javanese tradition, the practice of *barikan* is popularly known as *selamatan*. According to Geertz, a *selamatan* is a ritual aimed at commemorating, atoning for, or sanctifying a particular intention to seek protection and ease.⁴² In this tradition, *selamatan* is a collective spiritual effort to pray for tranquility and peace for the village and its residents.

⁴¹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 49.

⁴² Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 70.

Unlike puritanical Islamic groups, for example, those who view *selamatan* or *barikan* practices carried out at *punden* as elements of shirk, they involve supplications or prayers directed at ancestral spirits rather than solely at God.⁴³ From this perspective, such traditions are seen as a syncretic legacy of Islam and local beliefs that do not align with the principles of tawhid.⁴⁴ Thus, for some groups, participation in these traditions is not an act of tolerance but a compromise on doctrinal purity. This perspective often creates latent tension in society, especially when exclusive religious interpretations influence policies or citizen participation in shared traditions.

Second, interfaith prayer. Faith prayer is held on a different day after the *barikan* ceremony at the *punden*, specifically on the 1st of Muharram or at the beginning of the Islamic New Year. The activity was conducted in three sessions throughout the day. Christians prayed in the morning, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Christians praying together



Christians offer prayers as part of the mass—intercessory prayers or prayers for the protection of villagers and social harmony.⁴⁵ Additionally, they read verses from the Bible, singing spiritual songs with themes of nature and gratitude to God, and concluded with a reflection. On the afternoon of the same day, the Hindu community offered prayers, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Hindus praying together



⁴³ Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (August 2001): 701–29.

⁴⁴ Martin van Bruinessen, "Islamic State or State Islam? Fifty Years of State-Islam Relations in Indonesia," in *Ingrid Wessel (Ed.), Indonesien Am Ende Des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Abera-Verlag, 1996), 21.

⁴⁵ Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads: Indigenous Churches, European Missionaries, Islamic Association and Socio-Religious Change in Java, 1812-1936* (PT BPK Gunung Mulia, 1991), 40.

Hindu devotees in the *bersih desa* ceremony in Sukodadi chant prayers in the form of mantras from the Vedas and other religious texts, such as slokas, which are verses of praise for the gods, accompanied by sacred songs or gamelan music, similar to rituals performed by the Balinese Hindu community.⁴⁶ This ritual resembles the *Tumpek Wariga* celebration ritual, held every six months before the *Galungan* holiday. Both rituals serve to honor nature, seek safety, and maintain a cosmic balance between humans, nature, and God based on the concept of *Tri Hita Karana* in Hindu theological teachings about harmony between humans and God (*parahyangan*), humans and fellow humans (*pawongan*), and humans and nature (*palemahan*).

On the same evening, a joint prayer was held by the Muslim community of Sukodadi, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Muslims praying together



Muslims perform *tahlilan* as a ritual, reciting good words to pray for their ancestors and the safety of the community. *Tahlil* is a practice of syncretism between Islam and local Javanese traditions, involving reciting *dzikir*, *istighfar*, and congregational prayers to strengthen social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.⁴⁷ Thus, interfaith prayers in traditional practices serve as a medium for direct dialogue with God and for indirect dialogue between religious communities.

In Gavin D'Costa's research, the practice of interfaith prayer in the *bersih desa* tradition is called multi-faith prayer, which is not problematic. Meanwhile, interfaith prayer, which is problematic, involves praying together with the same words among different religious groups, accompanied by unity of heart and mind.⁴⁸ Some Catholic communities have followed the objective of Pope John Paul II to mix prayers of different types. The importance of prayer in social life lies in its ability to unite differences, build peaceful lives and foster harmony through love and joy.⁴⁹ The tumpeng parade or gunung procession, is shown in Figure 6.

⁴⁶ Fred B. Eiseman, *Bali: Sekala & Niskala: Essays on Religion, Ritual, and Art* (Tuttle Publishing, 2009), 338.

⁴⁷ Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (University of Arizona Press, 1989), 56.

⁴⁸ Gavin D'Costa, "Interreligious Prayer between Christians and Muslims," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24, no. 1 (2013): 1–14.

⁴⁹ A. Vijaya Nirmala, *Power Of Prayer: To Live in Harmony, Peace, Joy, Love and Abundance* (Stardom Books, 2022), 14.

Figure 6: Procession of tumpeng from the tomb to the village hall



This activity involved carrying the harvest from the ancestral tomb complex, specifically under a tomb gate decorated with yellow palm leaves. The harvest is then paraded to the front yard of the village office. This act honors ancestors through sacred symbols, one of which is the ancestral tomb.⁵⁰ The community brings a mountain of crops from the tomb complex, including vegetables, fruits, and other staple foods. This expresses gratitude for the abundance of sustenance, God's blessings, and hope for future blessings. Tradition also acts as a symbolic communication between the community and spiritual forces believed to remain in the village.⁵¹

Fourth, the puppet shows the closing ceremony for *bersih desa* activities, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Puppet show with the village head presenting a gift to the puppeteer



Wayang is a traditional performing art with a complex symbolic, philosophical, and spiritual richness.⁵² Wayang performances in this tradition highlight rituals. The village government provides full support in terms of facilities and funding, with a strong commitment to preserving the local cultural heritage. Wayang performances are entertainment for the people and a

⁵⁰ Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 70.

⁵¹ Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account*, *Varieties of Javanese Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 94.

⁵² Ardian Kresna, *Ensiklopedi Wayang, Sejarah, Riwayat Dan Sisilsilah Tokoh Dalam Pewayangan* (Lontar Mediatama, 2021), 4.

medium for education and reflection on the noble values inherited from ancestors, one of which is the dalang's story of the importance of unity and the avoidance of division.⁵³ However, the younger generation has begun to question the relevance of wayang performances in contemporary life because they are considered incompatible with digital entertainment tastes that are faster, more visual, and more interactive.⁵⁴

Therefore, religion and culture exert reciprocal influences on one another, engaging in dialectical processes within individuals' lives to foster a collective identity and harmonious relationships amid diversity.⁵⁵ In the tradition of *bersih desa* in Sukodadi, religious rituals and cultural performances are required to facilitate dialogue on differences in a unified manner. Religions and cultures have systems with similar binding values and symbols.⁵⁶ Both are capable of organizing and influencing social life to promote interfaith harmony.

Conclusion

The tradition of *bersih desa* in Sukodadi reflects harmony between the government, society, religion, and local culture. This tradition is a cultural heritage and a means of dialogue between religious communities. The aim is to increase interactions among religious communities, preserve traditions, and maintain peaceful coexistence by engaging various parties through a formal committee system initiated by the village government. This series of rituals contain elements of spirituality, local wisdom, respect for ancestors, and concern for nature and the environment.

In terms of rituals, this tradition is unique in its timing, conducted at the end of the big month and at the beginning of the Suro month, unlike other villages, which generally carry it out in the Selo and Suro months. There are four stages in the Sukodadi of *bersih desa* ritual that reflect values of diversity and unity. *First*, environmental cleanup activities symbolize mutual cooperation and ecological awareness. Meanwhile, *barikan* and *selamatan* are expressions of gratitude to God and respect for their ancestors. *Second*, interfaith prayers at three different times, led alternately by Christians, Hindus, and Muslims, are a form of recognition of religious diversity. *Third*, a parade of tumpeng or *arak-arakan gunung* (mountain-shaped offerings) of agricultural produce is a symbol of solidarity and gratitude for sustenance. *Fourth*, a wayang performance at the end of the *bersih desa* symbolizes the preservation of the arts and culture, laden with moral messages and educational values to strengthen social cohesion.

This tradition can build collective awareness, shared responsibility, and real contributions to strengthen faith tolerance. The government can use this as a model to formulate policies to strengthen tolerance and social harmony based on local wisdom. This tradition can be developed into an educational and spiritually valuable cultural tourist destination through collaboration between the village government, the community, interfaith leaders, and cultural figures.

⁵³ Hartono, Nuryani, and Kusumastuti, "Javanese Art Conservation in Indonesia Inheriting Potentials of Local Wisdom through Wayang Wong Bocah." 234-249.

⁵⁴ Heryanto, "Pop Culture and Competing Identities," 29.

⁵⁵ Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan Mentalitas Dan Pembangunan* (Gramedia, 2008), 2.

⁵⁶ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

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