

The Tradition of Black Goat Slaughtering at the Beginning of Suro: An Analysis from the Perspective of Islamic Law

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the tradition of slaughtering black goats at the beginning of the month of Suro, a practice that remains strongly preserved in Dusun Sarangan, Campurejo Village, Tretep District, Temanggung Regency. As part of the Javanese New Year celebration, the tradition involves the ritual selection of black goats with specific criteria, such as being male, young, and having intact horns. The meat is prepared and distributed to neighbors and relatives, reflecting the communal and charitable dimensions of the practice. Using a qualitative case study approach through interviews, observation, and documentation, the study reveals that the tradition embodies expressions of gratitude to Allah, ritual devotion, and social charity. From the perspective of Islamic law, the slaughtering of black goats is considered permissible insofar as it is motivated by charitable intentions and conducted in accordance with Islamic legal principles. Beyond its religious significance, the tradition also contributes to social cohesion and resource redistribution within the community. The findings highlight the importance of understanding local values while maintaining a balance between preserving cultural heritage and responding to contemporary social change.

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Introduction

The tradition of slaughtering black goats at the beginning of the month of Suro has been strongly preserved to this day among the community of Dusun Sarangan, Campurejo Village,

Tretep District, Temanggung Regency. This tradition constitutes an important element in the commemoration of the Javanese New Year and has been transmitted across generations as a form of respect for local cultural values. In its implementation, the community applies specific selection criteria to the black goats to be slaughtered, such as being male, relatively young, and having intact horns. The meat resulting from the slaughter is not only consumed by the organizing family but is also distributed to neighbors and relatives, reflecting the strong values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and social solidarity embedded within this tradition.

The tradition of slaughtering black goats at the beginning of Suro possesses deep historical and symbolic roots. A symbol functions as a sign that requires interpretation and carries its own meaning; such meaning does not stand independently but emerges through the act of communal reading and interpretation (Derrida, 1997). Accordingly, this practice extends beyond the mere acts of purchasing and slaughtering the animal and is accompanied by specific ritual procedures, including the burial of the goat's head, legs, and skin in locations regarded as sacred. These ritual elements indicate that the tradition is not merely a social activity, but one imbued with spiritual significance and collective beliefs that have evolved through the historical experiences and social realities of the local community.

Historically, this tradition is believed to have originated from the relocation of the community's settlement from Dusun Sumur to Dusun Sarangan, although the exact time of its emergence cannot be determined with certainty and is estimated to have occurred around the 1950s. Over time, the practice of slaughtering black goats at the beginning of Suro has come to represent a form of cultural and religious syncretism, in which local Javanese traditions are interwoven with religious practices embraced by the predominantly Muslim community. This condition generates particular dynamics, especially when the tradition is examined from the perspective of Islamic law, which requires clarity of intention, purpose, and procedural conformity to ensure that such practices do not conflict with the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. Within Islamic legal theory, custom or 'urf may be recognized as a valid consideration in the formulation of legal rulings, provided that it fulfills strict normative conditions (Sumarjoko, 2017).

Method

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine the tradition of slaughtering black goats at the beginning of the month of Suro in Dusun Sarangan, Campurejo Village, Tretep District, Temanggung Regency. Field research was conducted to capture the social, symbolic, and religious meanings embedded in the practice as understood by the local community.

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with community elders, religious leaders, and residents involved in the ritual, complemented by participant observation and documentation. Secondary data were obtained from relevant literature on Islamic law, Javanese cultural traditions, and the concept of 'urf. Data were analyzed using a descriptive-ytical method by identifying key themes related to ritual symbolism, social function, and religious legitimacy. The findings were then examined through the perspective of Islamic law to assess the compatibility of the tradition with Islamic legal principles, particularly regarding intention (niyyah) and the recognition of custom ('urf) as a valid legal consideration.

Results

Definition of Terms

Tradition ('urf) refers to cultural practices or customs that are transmitted from one generation to the next and implemented in everyday life. Tradition has three defining characteristics: it is practiced collectively by a group, it creates and affirms identity, and it carries diverse meanings within the Arabic language. The term 'urf is used to denote something that is considered good, commonly followed, and accepted by sound reason because it has become an established social habit. The term adat (custom) derives from the Arabic root 'ādah (عَادَة), meaning repetition. Although 'urf and adat are closely related, they differ in terms of repetition and the perspective of the actors involved (Sumarjoko, 2017).

In Islamic law, 'urf is recognized as a legal consideration under several principles, including: custom functions as law; legal rulings may change with changes in time; what is regarded as good may constitute 'urf; and norms established through 'urf may hold the same legal status as those established through textual sources (naṣṣ). Classical Islamic legal schools such as the Hanafī, Mālikī, Hanbalī, and Shāfi'ī traditions acknowledge 'urf as a legitimate basis for legal reasoning. Several legal maxims (qawā'id fiqhīyyah) further affirm the role of custom as law and the principle that legal rulings evolve with changing circumstances.

Slaughtering of Black Goats

Animal slaughter in Islam has a clear legal basis, as stated in Qur'ān Surah al-Mā'idah verse 3. Animals deemed lawful for consumption must undergo slaughter in accordance with Islamic legal requirements. These requirements include the eligibility of the slaughterer, the body parts to be cut, the tools used, the invocation of the name of Allah, and the proper method of slaughter. There are differing scholarly opinions regarding the permissibility of slaughter

performed by Zoroastrians (Majusi), though the majority view considers such slaughter unlawful for consumption. Black goats, often referred to as Javanese goats, hold a distinctive role within Javanese society. As discussed earlier, black goats are used as sacrificial animals at the beginning of the month of Suro in Dusun Sarangan, Campurejo Village, Tretep District. This practice indicates a significant relationship between the existence of black goats and local traditions and beliefs. Javanese society, which inherits a rich cultural and belief system, tends to attach symbolic meanings to various aspects of daily life, including livestock such as black goats. The selection of black goats for slaughter at the beginning of Suro may be associated with symbolism related to courage, resilience, or spiritual purification. From the perspective of Islamic law, this tradition is considered a form of 'urf that is not prohibited by shari'a, as it does not violate Islamic principles. The slaughtering of black goats at the beginning of Suro reflects compliance with Islamic law, particularly through the inclusion of proper intentions and prayers. The slaughtering process fulfills Islamic requirements, such as invoking the name of Allah, cutting the appropriate body parts, and using lawful tools. This ritual may be classified as both 'urf 'ām (general custom) and 'urf khāṣṣ (specific local custom) within a particular community. Although the tradition involves certain accessories and pre-slaughter rituals, these are regarded as elements of cultural heritage rather than practices contradicting Islamic teachings. It is essential, however, to ensure that the slaughtering process remains in accordance with Islamic principles so that the tradition can be preserved as a form of cultural heritage compatible with Islamic values in Dusun Sarangan.

Objectives of the Black Goat Slaughtering Tradition at the Beginning of Suro

The objectives of the black goat slaughtering tradition at the beginning of Suro include celebrating the Islamic New Year and preserving ancestral heritage; fostering a sense of safety and peace within the Sarangan community with the hope of attaining blessings and improving quality of life; expressing gratitude to God for the gift of life; honoring ancestors while giving thanks to Allah SWT; strengthening social relations and family bonds; and warding off misfortune while safeguarding the land and the community.

The tradition of slaughtering black goats at the beginning of Suro is regarded as highly significant and is performed annually. Interviews with key informants, including the hamlet head, religious officials (kaum), and residents, indicate that this tradition is not merely ceremonial but carries profound meaning and values that must be preserved. The people of Dusun Sarangan believe that the month of Suro holds sacred significance and serves as an appropriate time for reflection, self-introspection, and spiritual closeness to God.

Historically, this tradition began around 1975 and has since developed extensively within the community. The ritual of slaughtering black goats is not only an expression of respect for ancestral heritage but also an act of gratitude and a belief that performing the tradition will bring protection and blessings in the coming year. Although public attendance has declined, the values and symbolism embedded in the ritual continue to be preserved. Interview findings indicate that the tradition has a positive impact on maintaining safety, blessings, and communal harmony during the month of Suro. It reflects local wisdom and inherited beliefs passed down across generations, demonstrating a strong awareness of cultural identity and ancestral roots.

Culture and Traditions in the Month of Suro (Muharram)

The month of Suro (Muharram) continues to be preserved and revered in Javanese tradition. The sacralization of this month refers to divine decree and the reverence shown by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Historical events, such as the great flood during the time of Prophet Noah, add spiritual and historical dimensions to the month of Suro.

Furthermore, the recognition of Suro as a blessed period in which good deeds are multiplied encourages Muslims to compete in acts of righteousness. The virtues of this month are reflected in the rituals and prohibitions observed by Javanese society during this time, highlighting the distinctive local cultural approach to honoring the sanctity of Suro. The tenth day of Muharram, known as Ashura, holds particular significance in Islamic-Javanese tradition. Although there are variations in understanding the origin of the term "Suro," it is commonly recognized as an adaptation of the Arabic word 'Āshūrā', meaning "ten." This day has a rich history, including events such as the salvation of Prophet Moses (AS) and his people from Pharaoh. The practice of fasting on Ashura, as observed by Moses and the Jewish community, forms an integral part of the cultural heritage of the month of Suro, adding to its spiritual depth and sacredness.

The Relationship Between Black Goats and the Month of Suro in Tradition

The relationship between the use of black goats at the beginning of the month of Suro and concepts such as courage, spiritual purification, or other symbolic meanings within local tradition presents an important focus for further research. This relationship enhances understanding of the role of black goats in the cultural and spiritual context of Javanese society. Deeper research may further explore how local practices and beliefs interact with Islamic concepts, forming a unique synthesis that characterizes everyday life within Javanese Muslim communities. This tradition does not explicitly employ the term "Islamic law." Instead, terms

such as *sharī'a*, *fiqh*, and the law of Allah are commonly used to refer to legal and normative concepts. It is important to note that the term "Islamic law" itself is a Western scholarly translation used to describe a legal system derived from the Qur'an and Islamic legal tradition. In Western literature, efforts to understand and describe legal systems rooted in the Qur'an and the application of *sharī'a* and *fiqh* have contributed to the widespread use of the term "Islamic law" as a comprehensive representation (Mardani, 2010).

To understand the concept of Islamic law more deeply, attention must be given to the meaning of its constituent terms. The word "law" (*hukm*) originates from the Arabic root *ḥakama* (حُكْم), from which terms such as *maḥkamah* (court) and *al-ḥukm* (judgment) are derived. In the Islamic context, law does not merely denote rules or norms but also encompasses wisdom and behavioral control. Linguistically, it implies restraining or guiding behavior, akin to controlling a horse. This reflects the existential purpose of law in Islam, namely, to regulate conduct and prevent actions that contradict religious teachings. In Islamic thought, law signifies judgment and the resolution of disputes, serving as an instrument to establish order and clarity within society (Zainuddin Ali, 2022).

Discussion

The Implementation of the Black Goat Slaughtering Tradition at the Beginning of Suro

The implementation of the black goat slaughtering ritual at the beginning of the month of Suro in Dusun Sarangan cannot be separated from the symbolic system that lives and develops within the collective consciousness of the community. Each stage of the ritual from the selection of a black goat based on specific criteria, the ceremonial bathing of the goat, the recitation of prayers, to the burial of the head, legs, and skin in locations regarded as sacred contains symbols that are understood and interpreted contextually by the local community. These symbols are not treated as autonomous theological entities, but rather as media through which gratitude, hopes for safety, and efforts to maintain social and cosmological balance in communal life are expressed. Although Islamic law does not prescribe such rituals, as long as they do not contradict legal texts (*naṣṣ*), they are regarded as permissible customs ('urf *mubāḥ*) (Sumarjoko, 2017).

From Jacques Derrida's deconstructive perspective, symbols do not contain final or closed meanings; instead, they function as signs that acquire meaning through processes of reading and their relations with other signs (Derrida, 1967). Within this framework, the symbol of the black goat in the Suro tradition cannot be understood in an essentialist manner as a fixed symbol of polytheism or a particular belief system. Rather, its meaning emerges from

social practices, historical narratives, and the collective experiences of the Dusun Sarangan community, which continuously undergo reinterpretation in response to social and religious change.

The community's interpretation of this ritual indicates that the slaughtering of the black goat is positioned as a social and spiritual means of marking the Islamic New Year with gratitude and togetherness. The distribution of meat to residents, communal cooking activities, and the involvement of religious figures in the recitation of prayers demonstrate that the ritual symbols are framed within inclusive social and religious values. In this context, the meaning of symbols is not determined by a single text or doctrine, but by living communal practices that are continuously negotiated within the social space of the community.

Derrida's approach also helps explain why this tradition has been able to persist and adapt within a Muslim society. The symbols embedded in the ritual are not static, but remain open to reinterpretation in ways that align with Islamic values. Islam accommodates traditions that do not contradict the sacred texts of the Qur'an and Hadith, recognizing them as valid customs ('urf *şahîh*) (Sumarjoko, 2017). The validity of this tradition is evident in the fact that the black goat is slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law and its meat is consumed collectively. Conversely, traditions that conflict with sacred texts are rejected in Islam. This process reflects a dynamic form of cultural syncretism, in which elements of local tradition do not necessarily contradict Islamic teachings, as long as they are understood as cultural and social expressions rather than as deviant theological belief

Conclusion

This study concludes that the tradition of slaughtering black goats at the beginning of Suro in Dusun Sarangan is a cultural practice with deep historical roots, believed to have originated around the 1950s and preserved through intergenerational transmission. The continuity of this tradition reflects the community's strong attachment to local wisdom and collective identity, particularly in marking the Islamic New Year as a moment of reflection, gratitude, and social cohesion. From the perspective of Islamic law, this tradition can be classified as 'urf *şahîh* and *mubâh*, as it does not contradict the principles of the Qur'an and Hadith. The slaughtering process adheres to Islamic legal requirements, including the intention (*niyyah*), procedural compliance with sharia norms, and the invocation of the name of Allah. Moreover, the distribution of meat and communal participation demonstrate the social benefits of the ritual, reinforcing values of solidarity, mutual cooperation, and communal welfare. The findings also indicate that the symbolic and ritual elements embedded in the tradition function primarily as

cultural expressions rather than theological beliefs that deviate from Islamic doctrine. As such, the practice represents a form of harmonious interaction between local tradition and Islamic legal norms, illustrating how Islamic law accommodates social customs that bring benefit (maṣlahah) and avoid harm (mafsadah). Based on these conclusions, this study recommends the continued preservation of the black goat slaughtering tradition at the beginning of Suro, while ensuring that its implementation remains aligned with Islamic teachings. Efforts to strengthen religious education and community awareness are also essential, so that cultural heritage can be maintained without compromising religious principles. Through such an approach, the people of Dusun Sarangan are expected to sustain their cultural traditions responsibly, preserving both their ancestral heritage and their commitment to Islamic values.

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