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The Implementation of the Value of Mutual Cooperation in the Tradition of Grave Almsgiving as an Expression of Peace in the Community of Gempol Village, Cirebon Regency

Yeti Nurizzati^{1*}, Nindy Praditha Ayu Pertiwi²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, Cirebon, Indonesia

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Abstract

In this era of globalisation, the noble values inherited from the ancestors of the Indonesian people are beginning to fade or even disappear; one example is the value of mutual cooperation. In the past, communities always carried out activities for the common good through mutual cooperation, but this has now changed due to the tide of globalisation. However, not all regions have lost the value of mutual cooperation; there are still some areas that continue to uphold it. Gempol Village is one of several villages in Gempol Sub-district, Cirebon Regency, whose community still implements the value of gotong royong in the practice of the grave almsgiving tradition. The aim of this study is to identify the values of gotong royong embodied in the practice of the grave almsgiving tradition. The research method employed in this study is qualitative, utilising an ethnographic approach. The data collection techniques used in this study were observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings revealed that the practice of the grave almsgiving tradition embodies values of mutual cooperation, including solidarity, unity, voluntarism, kinship, self-sacrifice, prioritising the common good over personal interests, and mutual assistance in order to bring about peace in the community of Gempol Village.

Di era globalisasi ini nilai luhur yang menjadi warisan nenek moyang bangsa Indonesia mulai pudar bahkan hilang, contohnya yaitu nilai gotong royong. Dahulu masyarakat selalu melakukan kegiatan untuk kepentingan bersama dengan bergotong royong, tetapi kini sudah berubah karena arus globalisasi. Namun tidak semua daerah kehilangan nilai gotong royong, masih ada beberapa daerah yang masih mempertahankan nilai gotong royong. Desa Gempol ialah satu dari sekian desa yang ada di Kecamatan Gempol, Kabupaten Cirebon yang masyarakatnya masih mengimplementasikan nilai gotong royong dalam pelaksanaan tradisi sedekah makam. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui nilai-nilai gotong royong yang terkandung dalam pelaksanaan tradisi sedekah makam. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini yaitu kualitatif dengan menggunakan pendekatan etnografi. Sedangkan teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini yaitu observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian diperoleh bahwa dalam pelaksanaan tradisi sedekah makam terdapat nilai-nilai gotong royong pada pelaksanaan tradisi sedekah makam meliputi nilai kebersamaan, persatuan, sukarela, kekeluargaan, rela berkorban, mementingkan kepentingan umum daripada kepentingan pribadi, dan tolong menolong demi mewujudkan perdamaian masyarakat Desa Gempol. © The Authors.

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Corresponding Author:*Yeti Nurizzati**

Universitas Islam Negeri Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon
Jalan By Pass Sunyaragi, Kecamatan Kesambi, Kota Cirebon, Jawa Barat, Indonesia
Email: yeti678@uinssc.ac.id

1. Introduction

Indonesia has a high level of diversity in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, beliefs and customs [1]. There are 1,340 ethnic groups in Indonesia, with the largest concentration found on the island of Java, accounting for 41% of the total number of ethnic groups in the country. Indonesia is a nation characterised by diversity in terms of ethnic groups, regional languages, cultures and other resources. Indonesia is a diverse nation with a wealth of cultural diversity. Therefore, a shared national outlook and character are vital in achieving a just and prosperous society. By strengthening the national character, it is hoped that we can enhance the awareness of every individual in society to fulfil their role as social beings in life.

As social beings, humans cannot live in isolation. Every action taken by humans is inevitably connected to other people. As well as being individual beings, humans are also regarded as social beings. By their very nature, humans cannot live alone; therefore, to meet their needs, they require the assistance of others. Humans require interaction with others, and it is a natural human instinct to foster good relationships with one's fellow human beings. Consequently, humans constantly strive to maintain good relationships with one another.

Mutual cooperation is a long-standing custom or cultural practice in Indonesian society. All ethnic groups in Indonesia apply the principle of mutual cooperation in their daily lives. Mutual cooperation has become an integral part of Indonesian society and is one of the fundamental indigenous social institutions that play a vital role in the development of society [2]. Community spirit is a distinctive trait of the Indonesian people, particularly among those living in rural areas, and has been a tradition passed down through the generations [3]. The tradition of mutual cooperation is a cultural practice with distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other community traditions; it must be preserved within social life, particularly to resolve the challenges faced by residents and thereby enhance their well-being. Although the terms and their applications vary, in essence, all forms of cooperation are fundamentally about pooling strength, labour, resources and funds collectively to accomplish a task, including this tradition [4].

Research conducted by Anggorowati and Sarmini found that there are two types of mutual aid: inter-religious and intra-religious. Intra-religious mutual aid occurs in religious matters such as religious ceremonies, whilst inter-religious mutual aid occurs in the economic and social affairs of the community. Funeral rites in Islam are an example of intra-religious mutual aid that is still practised today. The community will help to wash the body, dig the grave, and carry the body to the cemetery. In addition, the community will also help to pray for the deceased for seven consecutive days due to their shared beliefs [5].

Mutual cooperation is a noble value that has become part of the Indonesian national identity. Bintaro stated that villagers' awareness of the need to be actively involved stems from their realisation that human beings depend on communal life. However, in the modern world, the culture of mutual cooperation is beginning to be forgotten and abandoned by Indonesian society. The dynamic changes occurring over time, whether due to geographical, political or economic factors, have also influenced the lives of people today [6].

Mutual cooperation is a distinctive Indonesian cultural practice that has existed since ancient times. Mutual cooperation is a complex cultural practice involving human activities within society. In line with the view that Koentjaraningrat divides culture into three forms, namely (a) culture as a complex of ideas, concepts, values, norms, rules and so on; (b) culture as a complex of patterned human behaviour within society; and (c) culture as artefacts created by human beings [7].

At present, we are facing the tide of globalisation, which has a positive impact on people's lives, particularly in Indonesia. The advanced technology available in this era of globalisation makes it easier for people to meet their daily needs and helps to streamline all human activities. However, the positive impact of globalisation also poses a threat to the practice of mutual cooperation. The national ethos that was once embodied in the culture of mutual cooperation is currently under threat from various factors. One such factor is the influence of globalisation, which is affecting the Indonesian public's perception of the essence of this culture. People are tending to become more

self-centred, consumerist and materialistic, with the result that the spirit of solidarity and brotherhood amongst the community is beginning to wane as it is eroded by the influence of globalisation.

In this era of globalisation, the noble values inherited from the ancestors of the Indonesian people are beginning to fade or even disappear; one example is the value of mutual cooperation. In the past, communities always carried out activities for the common good through mutual cooperation, but this has now changed due to the tide of globalisation. However, not all regions have lost the value of mutual cooperation; there are still some areas that continue to uphold it. Gempol Village is one of several villages in Gempol Sub-district, Cirebon Regency, whose community still practises the value of mutual cooperation in the observance of the tradition of grave almsgiving.

The community of Gempol Village is a homogeneous one, in which all members are Indonesian citizens and the majority belong to the Javanese ethnic group; in their daily interactions, they speak Javanese. As is typical of homogeneous rural communities, cultural values—particularly those of mutual cooperation—remain firmly upheld. The enduring nature of this spirit of mutual cooperation is evident in the practice of the tradition of grave almsgiving.

Research into the tradition of grave almsgiving is not a new field; there have been several studies examining a similar practice, namely grave almsgiving. The participation and cooperation of the Dukuh Masin community in achieving the objectives of the grave almsgiving ceremony constitute a form of social solidarity. Through the framework of Emile Durkheim's thinking, the religious behaviour exhibited by the young people and the entire community who assist in the running of the event is termed mechanical solidarity. Organic solidarity, meanwhile, can be seen in the organisation of a structured organising committee [8].

The tradition of grave almsgiving differs from the tradition of earth almsgiving, which is a customary celebration of the earth as an expression of the community's gratitude for the safety bestowed by God. The tradition of earth almsgiving in Tegal Arum Village is a way of cultivating a sense of gratitude as a form of thanks to God for the blessings He has bestowed [9]. The Earth Offering ceremony can serve as a model for fostering gratitude and community resilience among coastal communities in northern Central Java. The Earth Offering is a strategy employed by communities to anticipate and adapt to trauma, hardship, tragedy, threats and all sources of stress [10]. The values that can be examined within this tradition through the lens of functionalism include doctrinal values, ritual values, social values, cultural values and philosophical values [11]. The tradition of earth almsgiving also serves as a powerful solution to the moral decline affecting the nation's younger generation. This is reflected in the values embodied in the practice of earth almsgiving, which encompasses social, religious, economic and other aspects [12].

Humans not only reap the earth's bounty but also care for it through collective efforts to clean up the environment. This concept is similar to the ecosentrism paradigm, which describes all biotic and abiotic entities as important because they can aid human survival and preserve the surrounding environment. With the growing severity of the crisis and issues of environmental degradation, the tradition of earth almsgiving—as a form of local wisdom rooted in gratitude and ecosentrism—can serve as an alternative paradigm [13]. Another tradition is the practice of visiting graves, which has evolved into a social arena—serving as a venue for family gatherings, the healing of mental ailments, self-presentation, employment, spiritual renewal, the perpetuation of ritual practices, and the exercise of symbolic power [14].

Unlike previous studies, this research focuses more on the implementation of the value of mutual cooperation as an expression of peace within the tradition of grave almsgiving among the community of Gempol Village. The specific objective of the research is to identify the origins of the tradition of grave almsgiving practised by the community of Gempol Village, to describe the implementation of the value of mutual cooperation embodied in this tradition, and to analyse the impact of this tradition on the community of Gempol Village.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative method, as the approach adopted is a descriptive qualitative one. This means that the data collected in qualitative research is not in the form of numbers but derives from memos or other official documents, personal documents, field notes or interviews. Meanwhile, Corbin and Strauss state in their book that qualitative research is a type of research that is obtained through statistical stages or other forms of calculation [15]. By using descriptive data, researchers seek to describe an event, occurrence or phenomenon that is taking place at the present time. In other words, descriptive research focuses on actual issues or problems as they exist at the time of the study.

This study employs an ethnographic approach. Ethnography is an empirical and theoretical approach aimed at providing an in-depth description and analysis of culture based on intensive fieldwork. Ethnographic research aims to provide a holistic picture of the research subject, with an emphasis on individuals' everyday experiences, by observing and interviewing them and others associated with them. Ethnographic studies involve in-depth interviews and continuous observation of subjects within a given situation in an effort to capture the overall picture [16].

This study was conducted in Gempol Village, Gempol Sub-district, Cirebon Regency, a village that stands out from others due to its continued upholding of local traditions, which remain rich in local wisdom. The community of Gempol village is a homogeneous one, in which all members are Indonesian citizens, the majority of whom are of Javanese ethnicity and speak Javanese. This study employs an ethnographic approach, as the researcher examined the traditions still practised in Gempol Village, specifically the values of mutual cooperation within the tradition of grave almsgiving.

The data collection methods used in this study were observation, interviews and documentation. According to Bungin, in his book entitled *Qualitative Research Methodology*, an interview is a research method aimed at obtaining information for research purposes through a direct question-and-answer exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee, with or without an interview guide [17]. These interviews are usually conducted either individually or in groups, thereby yielding accurate data.

This study employs the data analysis technique developed by Miles and Huberman, which states that in the processing of qualitative data, the process is carried out interactively and continuously until completion, ensuring that the resulting data meets the requirements. Data processing activities include data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions from the data [18]. In this study, data reduction was carried out by recording interviews, transcribing them verbatim, selecting data suitable for inclusion in the research report, and reviewing the data to determine whether any parts required further refinement or clarification. The researcher then presented the data by producing brief summaries or narrative texts based on the results of the data reduction process. Finally, the researcher drew conclusions by seeking meaning from the data obtained.

3. Results

The tradition of 'sedekah makam' is a ceremonial gathering held once a year after the harvest season as a sign of gratitude. 'Sedekah makam' involves offering alms or offerings to the deceased. This tradition is one of the customs of the people of Gempol Village, passed down from generation to generation by their ancestors and inseparable from their culture. Usually, the tradition of grave almsgiving in Gempol Village is held on Friday Kliwon after Eid al-Fitr. This tradition is still upheld and practised by the community in Gempol Village. Furthermore, the tradition of grave almsgiving serves as a means for the community to maintain social ties. This is according to Mrs Maemunah (60 years old), a traditional leader interviewed by the researcher.

"The tradition of grave almsgiving is a ceremony of thanksgiving following the harvest season, during which the harvest is donated in memory of the deceased. This tradition takes place once a year at the Panggungan cemetery."



Figure 1. The Tahlil Ceremony in the Tradition of Grave Almsgiving

The spirit of mutual cooperation in the observance of this grave-offering tradition is evident in the community's collaboration in preparing for the event. According to Mrs Siti (65), a young committee member who actively participates in the grave-offering tradition and who was interviewed, she explained that:

“Preparations begin seven days before the event; prior to the ceremony, the organising committee makes announcements at the mosque and spreads the word by word of mouth. In addition, the entire committee prepares the venue, cleans the area and packs the rice. Members of the community taking part in the grave almsgiving tradition also work together to cook for those reciting the tahlil; the difference being that they cook at their own homes and then deliver the food to the gravesite.”

The tradition of grave almsgiving embodies the values of mutual cooperation. According to Mr Sanaji, who was interviewed, he stated that:

“In the tradition of grave almsgiving in Gempol Village, from the initial discussions right through to its implementation, there are values of mutual cooperation such as solidarity, a sense of family, mutual aid, and voluntary participation; moreover, the community prioritises the common good over personal interests.”

The culture of mutual cooperation embodies values that must be preserved and passed down from generation to generation. These values include a sense of community, mutual aid, kinship and unity. This sense of community is evident in the preparations: the day before the event, the organising committee and the community clean the venue. On the day of the event, the community cooks food in their own homes, which is then taken to the gravesite, where the organising committee wraps the food into portions to be distributed after the tahlil. Those participating in the graveside charity tradition, from the preparations right through to the event itself, do so on a voluntary basis.



Figure 2. Community Collaboration in Preparing Food for the Blessing Ceremony

According to Gyna (27), a traditional leader who was interviewed, there are both positive and negative impacts associated with the practice of grave almsgiving in Gempol Village.

“The positive impact of this tradition of grave almsgiving is that community cooperation is growing. This tradition serves as a means for the community to get to know one another, fostering a stronger sense of togetherness and family spirit amongst the people of Gempol Village. The negative impact is that the community still harbours a sense of prestige; for instance, when a family participates in the grave almsgiving tradition, they feel they must contribute more, better, and more varied offerings. Consequently, those who are less well-off feel disheartened because the dishes or food they bring are not on a par with those of the more affluent.”

The tradition of making charitable donations at gravesites also gives rise to differing religious views. Some members of the community regard such donations as an innovation (*bid'ah*), whilst others view them merely as a tradition or cultural practice inherited from previous generations. This has the potential to cause social conflict that divides the community if no common ground can be found. However, through a spirit of unity and tolerance, the community of Gempol Village has been able to set aside their individual self-interest, thereby achieving SDG 16—Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions—particularly in fostering peace.

In today's modern era, traditions and culture are beginning to be forgotten by the younger generation. Young people today are more interested in Western culture. Therefore, the role of parents and the community in preserving the tradition of grave almsgiving in the present day is greatly needed. It is hoped that young people and future generations will understand the values of the tradition of grave almsgiving and preserve it in Gempol Village.

Parents play a role in introducing the tradition of grave almsgiving by encouraging their children to take part in the practice. Young people are usually invited to bring food or produce to the grave pavilion. Boys are included in the *tahlil* ceremony whilst the grave almsgiving takes place. Young people are involved as members of the organising committee, preparing the facilities and equipment needed for the grave almsgiving tradition, and are involved in wrapping the food parcels that will later be distributed once the *tahlil* ceremony has finished.

4. Discussion

The term '*sedekah makam*' originates from the Javanese phrase '*sedekah desa*'. The Javanese people typically express their gratitude by performing '*sedekah makam*' with the intention of giving alms [9]. The tradition of grave almsgiving is a customary ceremony through which the community expresses its gratitude to Allah SWT for bestowing abundant blessings. In the anthropological dictionary, the term '*tradition*' shares a similar meaning with '*customs*', namely the magical-religious practices of an indigenous population's way of life, encompassing cultural values, norms, laws, and interconnected rules that form a well-established system of regulations. This system encompasses all the conceptual frameworks of a culture's cultural system to govern social behaviour within that society itself. Tradition is not something that changes; rather, it is viewed as the integration of human behaviour and patterns of human life in their entirety [19].

The tradition of making offerings at graves is one that continues to be upheld and preserved by the people of Gempol Village, as it is deeply ingrained in the community and inseparable from their culture. Cultural heritage is the physical product or result of different traditions and spiritual achievements in the form of values from the past, which constitute the fundamental elements of the identity of a group or nation [20]. Therefore, the tradition of making offerings at graves is one of the ancestral legacies that embodies the values of local wisdom, which must continue to be upheld and preserved by the people of Gempol Village, for upholding this tradition is tantamount to preserving the culture.

Gempol Village is one of the villages in Gempol Sub-district that still preserves the culture of mutual cooperation, which is put into practice through the tradition of grave almsgiving. The grave almsgiving is part of the local culture and has become a tradition passed down through generations within the Gempol community. This tradition is held regularly in Gempol Village once a year, specifically on Friday *Kliwon* in the month of *Shawwal*. The purpose of the grave almsgiving tradition is to express gratitude following the harvest season and to commemorate the deceased. Commemoration involves praying for the deceased with the aim that their good deeds may be accepted by Allah SWT and that they may receive forgiveness for the sins committed during their time on earth.

This tradition has sparked controversy, with some members of the community viewing it as an innovation that should be abandoned, whilst others regard it as a tradition that must be preserved. This conflict can be mitigated through a moderate understanding of religion, which emphasises tolerance and respect for differences, thereby fostering a peaceful and harmonious life in line with SDG 16: peace, justice and strong institutions [21].

Grave almsgiving is a tradition practised collectively (through mutual cooperation) to preserve customs that have existed since the time of our ancestors. In line with Van Reusen's view, tradition is a legacy of norms or rules, principles and customs; tradition is not something that changes, but is regarded as an integration of human behaviour and patterns of human life as a whole.

The practice of the grave almsgiving tradition embodies the values of mutual cooperation, which is carried out for the common good. Mutual cooperation involves working together to achieve a shared goal. Mutual cooperation is an act of kindness by all for the benefit of all, or the collective effort of all for the common good [22]. Mutual cooperation is described as a form of charity because it involves a sense of awareness. Mutual cooperation also encompasses a spiritual dimension; the very principle of gotong royong embodies an awareness of work—both spiritual and physical—within a collective endeavour. Mutual cooperation is a dynamic principle, even more so than the concept of kinship. Mutual cooperation represents a collective endeavour and mutual assistance for the common good.

Mutual cooperation is a community-based social activity focused on working together to lighten each other's workload. The behaviour of community members during gotong royong activities demonstrates a sense of solidarity within that group. Mutual cooperation is a cultural characteristic of the Indonesian people that has been passed down through the generations, thereby shaping tangible social behaviour within the value system of social life [23].

The value of mutual cooperation embodied in the practice of the grave almsgiving tradition in Gempol Village is the value of togetherness. The practice of the grave almsgiving tradition embodies the value of togetherness, in line with Budiuzman's view that the implementation of the value of togetherness comprises three elements: humility, service and mindset [24]. The value of togetherness is a form of mutual cooperation within the tradition of grave almsgiving, reflecting the characteristics of the community that comes together to practise this tradition. Mutual cooperation in everyday life—such as a sense of togetherness, the absence of coercion, or the emergence of a strong sense of awareness and responsibility through a sense of belonging—is evident in this context [25]. Working together will also foster understanding and mutual support; with this cooperation, the level of conflict will decrease [26].

A sense of community serves as a measure of the sincerity of a community that demonstrates loyalty towards one another. Furthermore, there is a sense of kinship within the tradition of grave almsgiving, whereby this tradition acts as a bond of brotherhood amongst the community. All activities carried out within the tradition of grave almsgiving are an expression of kinship, where the community shares a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and sincerity in the practice of this tradition. Furthermore, the tradition of grave almsgiving embodies the value of mutual aid. The community does not prioritise self-interest but demonstrates a united stance for the common good. Indirectly, the practice of the grave almsgiving tradition fosters a sense of kinship, togetherness, and mutual aid. If this spirit of unity is not upheld properly, it will have repercussions for the community in the future, thereby affecting the future practice of the grave almsgiving tradition. Therefore, the community must foster a sense of unity so that this tradition of making offerings at graves can be carried out peacefully every year.

5. Conclusion

The tradition of grave almsgiving is a customary ceremony through which the community expresses its gratitude to Allah SWT for bestowing abundant blessings. Grave almsgiving is one of the traditions of the people of Gempol Village that has been practised for generations, dating back to the time of their ancestors. This tradition of grave almsgiving is held annually, specifically on Friday Kliwon in the month of Shawwal. The purpose of the tradition is to hold a thanksgiving ceremony following the harvest season and to commemorate those who have passed away.

The values embodied in the practice of the grave almsgiving tradition in Gempol Village include a sense of community, kinship, mutual aid, voluntarism, and a community that prioritises the common good over personal interests. The grave almsgiving tradition is one that continues to be upheld and preserved by the people of Gempol Village, as it is deeply ingrained in the community.

This tradition of grave almsgiving has both positive and negative effects on the community. The practice embodies the values of mutual cooperation, which is a positive aspect. However, a negative aspect is that some members of the community still prioritise prestige, seeking to contribute more, better and more varied offerings. These values are important for maintaining peace in the community of Gempol Village.

A limitation of this study is that the respondents were not sufficiently representative of men, as there was only one male respondent, whilst the other five were women. This may have resulted in the respondents' answers being incomplete from a male perspective

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