



The Roles of Muhammadiyah in Shifting *Apeman* Ritual through State Power and Society

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the influence of Muhammadiyah in shifting the meaning of *Yaa Qowiyyu* ritual or *Apeman* in Jatinom, Klaten. The discussion focuses on examining the role of the dominant group in establishing the mainstream culture in the area. Upon its arrival, Muhammadiyah has established a strong existence in the village and has changed the beliefs of Jatinom residents about the ritual although they still keep the *Yaa Qowiyyu* existence. Consequently, changes are made in the ritual. The practice is no longer called 'ritual' as its term or meaning. Instead, *Apeman* has turned into a festival. Moreover, the residents' belief in receiving blessing from the traditional rice flour cake called *apem* has already gone. Through the ethnographic method, this research shows the ways Muhammadiyah shifted the Jatinom society's religious perspectives and the critical implications of the efforts to the ritual itself. This paper elaborates the aforementioned problems to observe whether Muhammadiyah did the subtle shifting to the local culture through state power. Using Foucault's theory about power and knowledge, this research observes the existence of cooperation between Muhammadiyah as the local organization and the state in modifying the ritual and its meaning into the festival. The symbols signifying the cooperation can be seen in this festival. Such cooperation shows that the nationalization and Muhammadiyahization, the process of a society's shift towards Muhammadiyah, run simultaneously in Jatinom village.

Keywords:

Ritual, *Apeman*, and State power

Introduction

Apeman is held annually during the month of Safar (Javanese calendar) in Jatinom district. This festival is closely related to some historical sites, including Ki Ageng Gribig's grave—the first person who spread Islam in Jatinom. Another historical site in this area is the first mosque established by Ki Ageng Gribig in Sememan village, Jatinom in 1862 called *Masjid Alit* (small mosque). There is also another mosque in this area named *Masjid Jami'* (big mosque). However, this mosque is not part of the history of K.A. Gribig. This area, where *Masjid Alit* and *Masjid Jami'* located, is called Mentaraman.

Historically, it was said that Sunan Solo (King of Solo) visited Jatinom every month. At that time, K.A. Gribig had a strong relationship with Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo, the King of Mataram. K.A. Gribig is the descendant of Brawijaya V, the King of Majapahit and he lived in the era of Mataram Kingdom, under the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo. At that time, K.A. Gribig had an intimate relationship with the Sultan. One thing that was highly valued by the Sultan from K.A. Gribig was the success of K.A. Gribig in quelling Adipati Palembang's rebellion without war. Due to his success, K.A. Gribig was offered a position as Bupati (the head of the regency). However, K.A. Gribig rejected this offer since he felt more contented as a parson. Thus, K.A. Gribig was given other gifts from the Sultan; a land and marriage with the sister of Sultan Agung named Raden Ayu Emas Winongan. The land given by Sultan Agung is called "Perdikan Mutihan" and on this land, K.A. Gribig built mosques and a boarding school.

One day K.A. Gribig and Sultan Agung went to Mecca for pilgrimage. After coming back from the pilgrimage, they brought two cakes originally from Mecca called the Arab's cake. The cakes were then cut and shared by the students, but were still not enough for all of them to eat. For this reason, the students of K.A. Gribig then took the initiative and started

cooking *apem* to substitute the Arab's cakes. Those *apem* cakes were also shared to the visiting neighbors. *Apem* is originally taken from an Arabic word *Afwun* which means 'blessing'. However, due to their different accent, the local people found it hard to pronounce *Afwun* rather than "*apem*". The *apem* cakes made by the students were accepted by K.A. Gribig. After he received the cakes, K.A. Gribig and his students prayed together to ask *berkah* (blessing) from Allah (God). *Berkah* is originated from Arabic word '*barokah*' which means something that gives benefits.

The sharing of *apem* by K.A. Gribig and his students then became the tradition and ritual named *Yaa Qowiyuu* or *Apeman* which is held annually to reminisce the story of K.A. Gribig in Mecca as well as the *Apeman* sharing. Practicing this ritual is believed to bring in *berkah* and to realize the unfulfilled wishes. The *Yaa Qowiyuu* itself is in accordance with the prayer chanted by K.A. Gribig after performing the rituals of pilgrimage in Mecca (1539). The prayer is "*Ya qowiyuu qowwina wal muslimin ya qowiyuu ya rozzaq warzuqna wal muslimin.*" means "Oh the Almighty God, give us and the entire Moslem community strength, Oh Lord, the most Powerful and most (continual) provider, provide to us and to the entire Moslem community."

Believe in the *berkah* and the mystical power of *apem*, people in Jatinom then started attending the sharing ritual, but the *apem* cakes are no longer being handed out from one person to others. Instead, the cakes are now thrown to the people flocking the field. This kind of practice was initially done by the family of K.A. Geng as a symbol of blessing. The symbol represents the history and contexts of society (Eliade 1985: 13) that also involves many people from remote places such as from eastern and western Java. After the death of K.A. Gribig, additional practice was included to respect the person. Not only do they share the *apem*, but Jatinom residents also visit the grave of K.A. Gribig to pray and ask *berkah*. Some of them use *apem* provided at the grave as a media of praying, and

some others simply pray at the grave. This practice is called *ziarah*.

From the writer's research and observation towards the ritual, changes are found not only in the practices but also in the essence of this ritual. This phenomenon is called a shifting of ritual (Haedar, 2016). Some local people have shifted their perspective towards *apem* cake which was long believed to give blessing or *berkah*. Such belief has no longer existed and thus praying at the grave is as well omitted. With those changes, *Yaa Qowiyuu* is now called festival instead of ritual. Unlike some local people whose belief in *apeman* ritual is slowly decreasing, people from outside Jatinom still, in fact, hold the belief in *berkah* provided by the *apem* cakes, the grave of K.A Gribig, and the spirit of K.A Gribig.

Those changes arouse some questions: (1) Why do those changes happen?, (2) What are the factors influencing those changes?, (3) Who are the actors changing the habit?, (4) Why do people from remote places still believe in *berkah* provided by the *apem*, the grave, or the spirit?, (5) If the majority of the people in Jatinom does not believe in the ritual anymore, why do they still preserve the ritual and hold this annually?, and (6) Why does the local government have big roles in managing this event?

To answer these questions, we first need to know the historical background or the contexts in Jatinom's society and the recent occurrences happening around the society, including the local organization and government. In-depth interview and observation are implemented to obtain a reliable data. In discussing or analyzing the data, the writer applies Foucault's theory on the power and knowledge and related to the theory with the issue of politic and specific practice in society. Due to the limitation of this paper, not all questions are answered completely therefore, the writer restricts the questions into two main aspects: (1) how does the shift of the event happen? (2) what are the critical implications of the shift to the event? At the end of this paper, questions for thought are provided as the conclusion.

Context of Jatinom Society and Shifting *Apeman* Tradition

Jatinom is recognized as one of Muhammadiyah base communities (Abdullah 1994: 1-12). It can be seen from the institutions, such as schools (from elementary to junior high schools) and village halls which are named and owned by Muhammadiyah. Strategic positions in the society (local government, boards of mosque caretakers, committees of the *Apeman* festival) are also handled by Muhammadiyah members. Muhammadiyah believes that activities, such as *ziarah* kubur (praying at the grave), asking blessing to ancestor in the grave, burning incense, *slametan* and any kinds of rituals that do not fit the Islamic teaching are considered as *bid'ah* (innovation in religious matters without having a proof from Quran or Sunnah). Thus, the existence of K.A Gribig's grave which is attended by many people as well as the *Apeman* festival is believed to be *bid'ah*. However, through NU perspective, those practices are said to be something normal and it is allowed to preserve such rituals. Just like similar ritual such as, Maulod in Aceh (Nurdin, 2016), Kupatan in Trenggalek, East Java (Amin, 2017), Merti Dusun in Salatiga Central Java (Haedar, 2016). The fact about Muhammadiyah's belief leads us to question the reason why Muhammadiyah members preserve activities which are strictly considered by the organization itself as *bid'ah*. It is well known as one of the dominated *fatwa of Muhammadiyah* is to fight against (*Takbayul, bid'ah, churafat*—Superstition, Heresy, Myth) which are considered as “contaminate” faith of Muslims. (Baskara 2017: 11)

Based on the interview with Mr. Adnan as *takmir* (the board member) of the Alit mosque, those things are not really become problem even though Muhammadiyah have given discourse and evaluation to *Apeman* festival and the existence of the grave. This festival does not only belong to Jatinom society but also to all people in Klaten. This festival and some historical places, such as the Alit mosque and the grave of K.A. Gribig, are managed under the supervision of Department of Tourism

(the government). This festival is managed by P3KAG (*Pengelola Pelestarian Peninggalan Ki Ageng Gribig*/Preservation Manager of the Heritage of Ki Ageng Gribig) and they must report all information and incomes to the Department of Tourism in Klaten district. Jatinom residents hold the *Apeman* festival simply to remember that event— as traders and participants who do not really pay attention to the festival as their ritual. Mr. Adnan also adds that **Jatinom** is abbreviated from: **ja**: *Jejeg agamane* (having a comprehensive understanding of religious belief); **ti**: *Teguh imane* (having a strong faith); **nom**: *nuboni omongan manis* (following polite speaking). When those words are put together, Jatinom means, “*masyarakat yang selalu takwa dan taat terhadap perintah-perintah Allah dan menjauhi semua yang menjadi larangan-larangan Allah, selalu beribadah kepada Allah, sopan, lemah hati di segala macam pergaulan*” (A society that always obeys and follows God’s commands, and keeps away from God’s prohibitions, always worships to God, be polite and humble in all relationships). This slogan was made by the people of Jatinom, especially Muhammadiyah prominent figures.

Several years ago, people would burn incense inside the grave as their praying ritual. The incense was put on big cattle. Apparently, the smoke from the incense floating high, producing strong scent around *Masjid Jami’*, and making Muhammadiyah people feel disturbed by that ritual. The organization assumed that burning incense is *bid’ah* so they recommended to completely removing that habit. Though the habit of burning incense still exists nowadays, the smell of it no longer disturb people who pray in the mosque since the intensity and quantity of the incense are reduced. Throwing *apem* at people used to be done at the area around *Masjid Jami’* and elementary school, but since 1990s it was relocated on the field near the river. The relocation was necessary because the crowds gathered for the festival in Muhammadiyah elementary school near *Masjid Jami’* destroyed the school building. Besides, there used to be *parogo* (some women who dance in the festival) using *Solo Basahan* (local or traditional clothes which

do not cover many part of women's body, usually used when they take bath), but since the outfit was considered inappropriate, Muhammadiyah suggested to eliminate *parogo* in the festival. That is why we cannot see *parogo* nowadays in the festival.

Based on the interviews to some local people who do not have critical positions in the society or prominent actors in Muhammadiyah, we found that they do not believe in the blessing of *apem*, and they said that only Allah (God) who can give blessing. They assume that this is prohibited to ask blessing to anyone and anything except God but they still participate in the festival. They make *apem* in every house and give some of them to the festival. Their participation shows solidarity to preserve the tradition besides keeping their theology in Muhammadiyah perspective.

However, people outside Jatinom area still assume that they can accept blessing from *apem*, and they also believe that people following the ritual will receive blessing from the *apem* and the grave. Most people coming to the festival are outsiders living in other places in Central Java, East Java, West Java, etc. Some of them believe that the *apem* can give fortunes to their family and life. A boy that we interviewed told us— after grabbing and eating *apem*-- that the cake can make him smart. Three elderly people who came from different places (Surabaya, Kendal, and Solo) said that they put the *apem* on their doors, believing that it protects and gives fortune to their families. They also said that only *apem* thrown by the thrower of *gunungan apem* (the mountain-like *apem*) has blessing or power.

Obviously, there are many reasons for people to come to the festival. People at Jatinom assume that the festival is simply part of their tradition in Javanese culture rather than regarding this as something religious. Here, we still have to consider that *Apeman* has social function in gathering people from many places to emphasize the existence of Jatinom.

The facts about the roles of Muhammadiyah to the Jatinom society indicate that Muhammadiyah figures try to reform some parts of the

traditions which do not fit the Islamic teachings. Their other contributions to the tradition of Jatinom society and shift from a ritual to festival were when the former figures of Muhammadiyah came to Jatinom, in 1974. At that time, the concept of *gunungan apem* (*gunungan lanang*/ male and *wadon*/ female, *lanang* is taller than *wadon*) was firstly emerged. The structure of the *gunungan apem* was based on rakaat in Islamic prayer; *Isa*, *Subuh*, *Zubur*, *Asar*, and *Magrib* (4-2-4-4-3). They made two *gunungan apem* (the mountain-like *apem*) as the symbols of male and female. These *gunungan* are full of *apem* cakes added with some vegetables and fruits such as chili, carrot and long bean representing their farming and trading. After the Friday prayer, *apem* cakes from *gunungan apem* are shared to the people crowding the place, the Jatinom society.



Picture (1). *Gunungan Apem* (left) and *Apeman* festival (right)

The above discussion shows the roles of Muhammadiyah in the process of Islamization in Jatinom cultures. Obviously, they do not cross out all of the traditions, because they have interests, in relations to local politics and economics, and in a soft negotiation process. This has to be viewed as an effort or a process from outsiders (in this case, Muhammadiyah) become insiders as the majority of people in the society itself have become “Muhammadiyah”. This change of perspective does not affect people who do not live in Jatinom because their dependence on

this area is only related to the ritual that, for them, is still acknowledged as part of religious practice, not merely festival— without any significant influences from Muhammadiyah.

The Roles of Muhammadiyah in Shifting Tradition of Apeman

The crucial question after the observation and interview related to the shifting above is how could Muhammadiyah change many things in the tradition, but the local people still find it hard to say directly that it was actually Muhammadiyah who did all those changes. Here, we can see the state power in changing these all in frame of cooperation between Muhammadiyah and the government. As our interview with some Muhammadiyah figures, they usually communicate their aspirations to the government in Klaten Regency, especially through the districts (*kecamatan*), and then the head of the districts (*camat*) decide a policy to manage the festival or continue it to the higher level in the structure of local government.

This cooperation must have been settled since Orde Baru (The New Order), when Muhammadiyah started to spread their influence in this society in 1974. Muhammadiyah did not use their power directly but through the state power to legitimate the change or the shift in the society. Not only did Muhammadiyah gain benefit from the shift which was based on their teaching and/or the cooperation, but also the government who received income from tourism and *zakat* (donations) given by the people practicing *ziarah*. Surely, the local politics can be controlled by the state. Here, it is difficult to separate Muhammadiyah from the state as some of the Muhammadiyah members are having positions in the government.

The correlation between Muhammadiyah and the state can be seen through several symbols existing in the location in which *ziarah* and praying take place. For instance, at the grave, there are symbols of the state such as the Indonesia's national flag, *garuda pancasila* (see the following

picture), and the sign of preservation manager (P3KAG). This can rarely be seen at the graves wherein Muhammadiyah does not exist, so therefore, the connection between the two is undeniable. Another example is when the function of the *Masjid Alit* (heritage of former traditions) is changed only for formality in welcoming parade of *Apeman*, and the *Masjid Besar*, as Muhammadiyah base, now is taking an important role in the process of *Apeman* and to society. Moreover, the starting point of the parade is from the district and finish at *Masjid Besar* (Muhammadiyah). These practices have all shifted the traditions, from ritual to festival, and from a blessing to a mere entertainment and other functions. In other words, this tradition is not only shifted into Islamization but also nationalization.



Picture (2). Indonesia's National Flag (left) and *Garuda Pancasila* (right)

Related to Foucault's theory, the above phenomenon can be classified as the disciplinary of power and knowledge (Inda 2005: 52-55). This is related to the theory which is used by Foucault to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. Here, the problems of modernity have to be considered as factors which influence the atmosphere of the cooperation. Muhammadiyah emphasizes more on the knowledge which is distributed through the state and the society. The knowledge itself has to be seen as power, the softest power than violent and welfare. By sharing knowledge

to the society, they would not be directly aware of the actual agenda this community brought in, let alone affiliating themselves to Muhammadiyah. Whereas, the state by its power as systemic and powerful in determining the change of the society has been empowered or manipulated by another group. Still, we cannot say that it is only Muhammadiyah gaining benefits from this shift of phenomenon because the slogans and symbols of state to maintain and enhance its power are, in fact, supported by the society and the local organization. National stability and security have been well implemented. Thus, it can be said that state has manipulated the society and its organization.

According to Foucault, politics of the state and those who have big power define specific practice within culture (Carrette 2000: 144). The culture has been utilized for political interests which, in turn, influences the specific practice. Indeed, *Apeman* has been shifted as a specific practice of Jatinom society in supporting or covering the political interest and the games of power. Unquestionably, there will be many implications, such as (1) the understanding of the local society (the owner) to their own culture has been shifted, (2) the practice and behavior of society may have different orientation than before, and (3) this also influences the contestation and pattern of local politics referring to Muhammadiyah politics.

Conclusion

The shifting tradition happened in Jatinom has to be seen as an effort of Muhammadiyah in Islamizing the society and its cultures and/or traditions. Before the arrival of Muhammadiyah in Jatinom, Muhammadiyah people are still the outsiders. However, nowadays they become the insiders. The influences and changes happened within the society has, of course, affected their behaviors and traditions. This changes may not fit to their previous teachings or theologies. However, we cannot say that these changes are solely caused by Muhammadiyah. The

state power also takes a major role in maintaining and enhancing, in term of nationalizing, its power to the local society through cultural changes, including specific practices within the society. Primarily, Muhammadiyah and the state have big roles in shifting the *Apeman*, seeing the fact that the ritual has now become a festival by the local people, and the essence of blessing has turned into a fun and enjoyable event, as well as other interests of the society (as commercial, capital, and political orientations) and problems of modernity. Power and knowledge are the main sources of this shifting. Here, we still have to leave many questions regarding this phenomenon as in how the outsiders or people from the other places run their knowledge and power to the shifting. Another probability is whether there is a contestation which is not only part of polarization of Muhammadiyah and state but with other elements as well.

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