

Symbolic Interactionism In The Traditional Ceremony of Saparan Bekakak in The Village of Ambarketawang, Gamping District, Sleman Regency, Special Region Of Yogyakarta

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Abstract

The Saparan Bekakak ceremony in Ambarketawang Village, Gamping District, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, was inspired by a tragedy that befell the servants of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I, named Ki Wirasuta and Nyi Wirasuta. The Saparan Bekakak ceremony is held annually and continues to this day. In social science studies, particularly from a symbolic interactionism perspective, this tradition is interesting to study because it contains symbols, meanings, and patterns of social interaction that are an important part of the collective identity of the local community. This research is designed using qualitative methods with a case study approach. Data will be collected through direct observation of the ceremony, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, organizing committees, and the community, as well as archival documentation and local historical records. Data analysis will be conducted interactively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The symbolic interactionism theoretical framework was chosen to interpret how the symbols that appear in the series of ceremonies, such as the slaughter of bekakak (dolls made of sticky rice), processions, and communal prayers, are understood, interpreted, and reproduced in the social life of the Ambarketawang community. Through this research, it is hoped that a deeper understanding can be gained regarding the role of the Saparan Bekakak ceremony as a means of social and symbolic interaction in maintaining solidarity, strengthening the value of togetherness, and preserving local cultural identity. This research is also expected to contribute theoretically to the development of symbolic interactionism studies in the context of Indonesian cultural traditions, as well as to provide material for reflection on the importance of preserving local wisdom amid increasingly complex social dynamics.

Keywords: Saparan Bekakak; Ambarketawang; Traditional Ceremony; Symbolic Interactionism; Collective Identity; Local Wisdom.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a nation rich in traditions and local wisdom that are deeply rooted in its social structure and long history of civilization. Each region has its own rituals and traditional ceremonies that serve not only as cultural heritage, but also as a means of social and spiritual communication. One tradition that remains alive today is the Saparan Bekakak Traditional Ceremony in Ambarketawang Village, Gamping District, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta.

This tradition has its roots in the tragic story of Ki and Nyi Wirasuta, servants of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I who died in the area. As a form of respect, the community holds an annual ritual of making human dolls from sticky rice (bekakak), which are then symbolically slaughtered. This ceremony is not only an expression of spirituality, but also contains social,

moral, and collective solidarity values that have been passed down from generation to generation.

To understand this tradition in depth, it is important to explore its historical context: namely, the birth of the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace and the symbolic system established by Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono I in the 18th century. The establishment of the Yogyakarta Palace was a result of the Giyanti Agreement (February 13, 1755), which divided the Mataram Kingdom into two centers of power, namely the Surakarta Sultanate and the Yogyakarta Sultanate. Prince Mangkubumi was appointed as Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono I, marking the birth of a new sovereign political-cultural entity in southern Java (Ricklefs, 1974).

After 1755, Sultan Hamengkubuwono I established the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace in a strategic location between the Code River (east) and the Winongo River (west), on a plain that was safe from flooding but still within reach of the fertile agricultural area of Sleman. The choice of location was rich in cosmological meaning: the palace was placed at the center of an imaginary north-south axis connecting Mount Merapi, the Palace, and the Indian Ocean. This axis is known as the “philosophical axis of Yogyakarta,” representing the balance between the spiritual dimension (north), humanity (center), and nature (south). This principle of balance is also reflected in folk rituals, including Saparan Bekakak, which maintains harmony between humans, nature, and supernatural forces (UNESCO, 2023).

In Javanese cosmology, the king is the center of the cosmic order. The palace not only functions as the center of government, but also as the “axis mundi” (axis of the universe) that connects the spiritual and material dimensions (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, folk rituals such as Saparan Bekakak can be understood as a symbolic extension of the palace's value system: respect for ancestors, preservation of the balance of nature, and an expression of loyalty to spiritual rulers who are considered representatives of God on earth.

The reign of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I (1755–1792) is known as a period of political consolidation and cultural revival in Java after the fall of Mataram. He established the spatial layout of the city of Yogyakarta, strengthened the irrigation system, and revived the arts and culture of the palace. It was also during this period that a number of agrarian and communal rituals were formed and spread to surrounding areas, including Ambarketawang. The community in the southwestern part of the palace—now the Gamping District—became an important part of this cultural network.

Ambarketawang Village itself has an interesting geographical landscape. This area is located on the undulating terrain of the limestone hills and valleys in the southern part of Sleman, about 8 km from the center of Yogyakarta. It is flanked by two large rivers (Progo to the west and Winongo to the east) with fertile soil resulting from volcanic deposits from Mount Merapi to the north. This position makes it a transitional area between urban and rural, where traditional values remain strong despite ongoing modernization. This geographical character also determines the form of the Saparan Bekakak ritual: the procession passes through rice fields and settlements, connecting sacred (graves) and profane (settlements) spaces, creating a symbol of social-spiritual balance.

Folk traditions in Ambarketawang, including Bekakak, cannot be separated from the direct influence of the culture of the Yogyakarta Palace. Folk rituals serve as a reflection of palace values adapted by village communities. As stated by Karjanto (2022) in “Revisiting Javanese Pranata Mangsa and Traditional Knowledge” (*Journal of Indonesian Cultural Studies*), Javanese local knowledge about time and seasons is rooted in the palace's system of symbols

and cosmology. Similarly, Situngkir & Prasetyo (2015) in “On Social and Economic Spheres: An Observation of the ‘Gantangan’ Indonesian Tradition” (Indonesian Journal of Social Sciences) emphasize that agrarian folk traditions are a vehicle for the reproduction of socio-economic values and communal cohesion.

Within the framework of symbolic interactionism, social meaning is not naturally attached to an object, but is created and negotiated through the process of human interaction. As stated by Herbert Blumer (1969), humans act towards something based on the meaning they give to it, and that meaning arises from the results of social interactions that are continuously modified through the process of interpretation. In the context of the Saparan Bekakak Ceremony in Ambarketawang, symbols such as the bekakak doll, the parade, and the communal prayer procession derive their meaning not from their form alone, but from the collective actions and symbolic communication that occur among the residents. Through this process, the community reaffirms its identity, sense of togetherness, and relationship with its ancestors and the universe.

The ritual dimension deepens this analysis. Victor Turner (1969) in his work *The Ritual Process* explains that every ceremony has a phase of liminality—a threshold state in which everyday social structures are set aside to make room for the creation of *communitas*, a sense of equality and brotherhood that transcends social status differences. In Saparan Bekakak, the moments from the procession to the symbolic slaughter are tangible manifestations of this liminal space. Residents shed their daily social roles as farmers, traders, or village officials, and temporarily become part of a unified communal entity. After the ceremony is over, the social order is reaffirmed, but with new energy derived from the experience of togetherness.

Randall Collins' (2004) theory of Interaction Ritual Chains provides further explanation of how rituals such as this maintain their vitality. According to Collins, each ritual encounter generates emotional energy that strengthens social solidarity and gives birth to collective symbols that have moral power. The Saparan Bekakak ceremony, held annually, functions as a ritual chain that continuously renews the emotional energy of the people of Ambarketawang. The more often they participate in the ceremony, the deeper their sense of belonging to the tradition becomes. This is why the Saparan tradition has survived amid modernization: because it provides a space for emotional and spiritual renewal that is continuously sustained through repeated participation.

In addition, the continuity of the ceremony can also be explained through the concept of frame alignment developed by Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (1986). They argue that collective participation in a social or cultural movement depends on the alignment of meaning between the organizers and participants. In the context of Saparan Bekakak, traditional leaders, organizers, and villagers align their interpretive frames: the ceremony is understood as a ritual to ward off evil spirits, give thanks for the harvest, honor ancestral heritage, and affirm village identity. It is this flexibility of frames that allows younger generations to remain involved, even though their motivations vary—from religious belief to pride in cultural heritage. This alignment of frames keeps Saparan Bekakak relevant in various social contexts.

In Javanese tradition, the ritual form closest to Saparan is slametan, as studied by Andrew Beatty (1996) in his article *Adam and Eve and Vishnu: Syncretism in the Javanese Slametan*. Beatty explains that slametan is not merely a communal meal, but rather a symbolic communication that creates social harmony. By comparing his findings with Clifford Geertz's (1960) classic analysis, it can be concluded that the power of Javanese rituals lies in their flexibility of meaning: they are capable of accommodating diverse interpretations, yet still bind

all participants in a shared experience. In this case, Saparan Bekakak functions like a large-scale slametan—a celebration that normalizes differences and reinforces social cohesion through shared symbols.

Previous research conducted by Suyanto (2019) in the *Journal of Reflective Sociology* shows that traditional ceremonies in Java have a social function in strengthening community cohesion and maintaining balance between humans, nature, and supernatural forces. Similar findings were also found in Dewi's (2020) research in the *Humaniora Journal*, which stated that symbolism in traditional ceremonies is a means of cultural communication to maintain the values of mutual cooperation and social solidarity.

Thus, Saparan Bekakak can be seen as a form of reproduction of palace values at the grassroots level. It becomes a space where spiritual symbols (bekakak, offerings, prayers) are reinterpreted through social interaction. The community does not merely preserve rituals, but also negotiates their meaning in a modern social context: tourism, cultural identity, and communal solidarity.

Historically, this cultural heritage has survived despite various political upheavals in Yogyakarta. Important events such as the British invasion of Yogyakarta in 1812, which was studied in depth by McKinnon & Peter Carey (2024) in the journal *Archipel*, show how fragile the palace's authority was during the colonial period. However, amid the physical collapse of the palace at that time, the cultural power of the people became a symbolic fortress. Traditions such as Bekakak became a medium of cultural resistance against colonial pressure, as well as a means of preserving Javanese identity at the grassroots level (Carey, 1976; 1984).

From a symbolic interactionism perspective, the meaning of rituals such as Saparan Bekakak is not static but is continuously shaped through social interactions among residents. The process of preparation, procession, and communal prayer forms a symbolic communication network that strengthens social cohesion and cultural awareness. By understanding the historical roots of the palace and the geographical conditions of Ambarketawang, this study aims to reveal how this tradition functions as a mechanism for preserving identity and a space for the reproduction of social meaning amid changing times.

METHOD

The type of research used is a case study, because the researcher focuses on one specific cultural event in a particular location, namely the Saparan Bekakak Ceremony in Ambarketawang Village, Gamping District, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. According to Yin (2018), case studies are used to examine contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, where the boundaries between phenomena and contexts are not clearly defined. In other words, this study not only examines rituals as cultural objects but also considers the social environment, community values, and local history that shape these traditions. This approach allows for an in-depth interpretation of the symbols and social interactions of the Ambarketawang community.

The research location was chosen purposively because Ambarketawang is the only area that still maintains the Saparan Bekakak tradition in its original form. Geographically, this village is located in a transitional area between the urban area of Yogyakarta and the rural area of Sleman, making it an interesting social space to observe the interaction between modernity and tradition. The pluralistic nature of the community, consisting of various social strata, makes this traditional ceremony an effective vehicle for social integration. The researcher will use this

geographical and social context as the basis for interpreting the symbolic practices and social interactions of the residents.

The research subjects include the ceremony participants, traditional leaders, the organizing committee, and the community who participate in or witness the activities. Researchers will also interview cultural figures, religious leaders, and village officials who understand the history and meaning of this tradition. Informants will be selected using snowball sampling, whereby the initial informant (traditional leader) will recommend other relevant names until the information is considered saturated (data saturation). This technique is expected to yield diverse yet complementary views on the symbolic function and social interaction in Saparan Bekakak.

Data will be collected through three main techniques, namely participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation will be conducted because the researchers want to understand the dynamics of the ceremony from within, witnessing and even participating in certain activities, as suggested by Spradley (1980) that an understanding of symbolic meaning can only be obtained through direct involvement in the field. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner so that the researcher could adjust the direction of the questions to the informants' responses, while documentation in the form of photographs, historical records, and local government archives was used to enrich the empirical data and support triangulation.

Data analysis was conducted interactively following the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting information relevant to the research focus, namely symbols and social interactions in ceremonies. Data presentation was carried out through descriptive narratives and thematic categorization based on the stages of the ceremony, such as preparation, procession, symbolic slaughter, and communal prayer. Subsequently, conclusions were drawn by linking the field findings with symbolic interactionism theory and the concepts of ritual and cultural meaning. This analysis process was simultaneous, carried out from the beginning of data collection to the final stage of report writing.

To ensure data validity, source triangulation and method triangulation techniques were used as suggested by Denzin (1978). Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from traditional leaders, the general public, and historical documents, while method triangulation was carried out by combining observation, interviews, and documentation. In addition, the researcher also applied member checking by confirming the interview results with the informants to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation. These steps are important so that the research results can be scientifically accounted for.

Another important aspect is research ethics. Given that traditional ceremonies are sacred activities laden with spiritual meaning, researchers must respect the norms and beliefs of the local community. Before conducting research, researchers will seek official permission from the village government and traditional leaders. All informants will be given an explanation of the purpose of the research and their right to refuse to answer or stop the interview at any time. The principle of informed consent is upheld, and all personal data of informants is kept confidential.

Through this methodological approach, the research is expected to produce a deep understanding of the role of symbols, social interaction processes, and the cultural function of

the Saparan Bekakak Ceremony for the Ambarketawang community. Contextual and interpretive qualitative methods provide space for local meanings to speak from the perspective of the community itself. The results of this study are expected to not only enrich the study of symbolic interactionism theory in the context of Javanese culture, but also contribute to efforts to preserve traditions as part of the identity and vitality of the people of Yogyakarta.

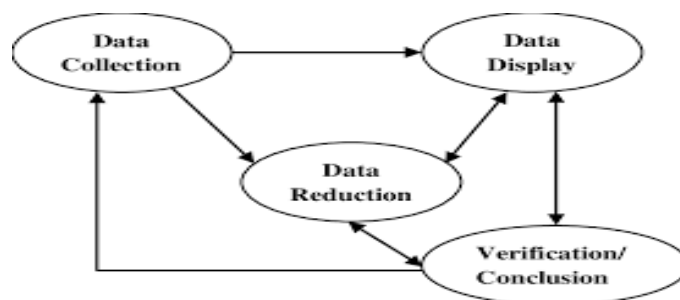


Chart 1.
Miles and Huberman's Interactive Data Analysis Model
(Patilima 2016:102)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ambarketawang Village, Gamping District, Sleman Regency, is one of the areas with a rich culture and strong local traditions. Geographically, this area is located on the border between Sleman Regency and Yogyakarta City, making it an area with quite heterogeneous social dynamics. Ambarketawang Village is located in Kapanewon Gamping, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, with an area of approximately 635.89 hectares (6.36 km²). This area is located at coordinates 7°48' south latitude and 110°21' east longitude, with an average altitude of approximately ±92 meters above sea level. Administratively, Ambarketawang consists of 13 hamlets, namely Gamping Kidul, Gamping Lor, Ngebel, Jetis, Gamping Tengah, Balong, Pelemsewu, Gampingan, Sonosewu, Ngebelgede, Ngentak, Nglarang, and Gamping Baru (AmbarketawangSID, 2017). The topography consists of gentle slopes in the east and south, and undulating terrain in the west near Mount Gamping, a limestone hill that is characteristic of the region's geology.

The research findings answer two main questions: the nature of the saparan bekakak traditional ceremony in the village of Ambarketawang, and the dynamics of symbolic interaction in the saparan bekakak traditional ceremony.

1. The saparan bekakak traditional ceremony

Most of the people of Ambarketawang work as farmers, traders, and informal sector workers. Despite undergoing modernization, they continue to preserve Javanese cultural values, especially in the form of the Saparan Bekakak traditional ceremony, which is held every month of Sapar (Javanese calendar).

This ceremony originated from the legend of Ki and Nyi Wirasuta, servants of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I who died tragically. As a form of respect, the community then held a ritual by making human dolls from sticky rice (bekakak) as a symbolic substitute for offerings to their ancestors.

The Saparan Bekakak ceremony is the highlight of the cultural celebrations of the Ambarketawang village community, which takes place every month of Sapar in the Javanese calendar. The series of activities usually begins in the middle of the month of Sapar and culminates on Friday or Saturday Pahing, according to the traditional calendar, which is believed to bring blessings. This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation since the time of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I and is inherited as a form of respect for the royal servants Ki and Nyi Wirasuta, as well as an expression of gratitude from the community to God Almighty for their safety and abundant harvest.

The first stage is the preparation for the ceremony, which is carried out by the residents working together. Several weeks before the day of the ceremony, traditional shamans, elders, and village representatives hold a meeting at the village hall to determine the date, form of activities, and division of tasks. It is at this time that the spirit of harmony is clearly evident. The women prepare traditional foods such as sticky rice, brown sugar, coconut, and tumpeng, while the men arrange the venue, decorate the stage, and make bekakak dolls, which are the main symbol of the ceremony.

The making of bekakak is a meaningful procession in itself. Bekakak is made from sticky rice dough and brown sugar, shaped to resemble a pair of humans, complete with traditional Javanese clothing. This pair of bekakak symbolizes Ki and Nyi Wirasuta—a couple who were servants of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I who died in Ambarketawang. The choice of sticky rice as the base ingredient signifies attachment and togetherness; its sticky nature is expected to reflect the unity of the community. Bekakak is made collaboratively at the traditional shaman's house, usually two days before the main ceremony.

The next stage is village cleansing, which involves cleaning the physical and spiritual environment. Residents work together to clean roads, gutters, and public areas such as the village hall and Gamping market. Cleaning the village is seen not only as a sanitation activity, but also as a symbolic ritual to “clean” everything bad before entering the sacred procession. In the community's view, this activity is a form of physical and spiritual effort to ensure that the ceremony runs smoothly and the village is free from calamity.

Once everything is ready, the community holds a midodareni night, a night of prayer and tirakatan held the day before the peak of the event. This activity is usually centered in the house of a traditional leader or the village hall. Prayers in Arabic and ancient Javanese are recited alternately by religious leaders and traditional shamans. The meaning of midodareni is spiritual purification and surrender to God. This night also serves as a means of social introspection; residents forgive each other and strengthen their intention to maintain harmony together.

The next day, the main ceremony begins with an opening prayer and a procession of bekakak. From early morning, residents gather in the village hall courtyard. Male and female bekakak are carried on bamboo palanquins decorated with yellow palm leaves, jasmine flowers, and parang-patterned batik cloth. The procession is led by imitation palace soldiers, followed by a gamelan group, dancers, and a line of residents carrying tumpeng and offerings. Throughout the journey, traditional music, such as “*Ladrang Sarinah*” or “*Gati*,” is played, adding to the sacred and festive atmosphere.



Figure 1.
Male and female Bekakak are lifted onto a bamboo stretcher decorated with yellow palm leaves in the village courtyard.

The route of the arak-arak bekakak usually starts from the Ambarketawang Village Hall heading northwest, passing through the hamlets of Gamping Tengah, Ngentak, and Gamping Lor, then ending in the Gunung Gamping area—limestone hills that are the site of symbolic slaughter. This route was chosen because it is believed to be the location where Ki and Nyi Wirasuta fell. Along the way, people line the roadside to watch, carrying small offerings and scattering flowers as a sign of respect. Children usually wear traditional clothing, while women carry bouquets of flowers to be scattered at the main location.



Figure 2.
The Bekakak was paraded towards the Gunung Gamping.

Upon arriving at Gunung Gamping, the procession stops in front of a small altar called *pundhen*—a place considered sacred and the center of symbolic slaughter rituals. The *bekakak* is placed on a bamboo table decorated with banana leaves and *kanthil* flowers. Traditional leaders lead the opening prayer in Javanese *Kromo Inggil*, asking for protection from the Creator and blessings from the spirits of the ancestors. After that, a symbolic slaughter of the *bekakak* was carried out with a small *keris*. This action symbolized sacrifice, gratitude, and surrender to the will of God, not in the sense of human sacrifice, but as a form of spiritual sublimation of past events.



Figure 3.

The *bekakak* was slaughtered by the deputy regent of Sleman at a place called “*pundhen*”

After the slaughter, the procession continues with the symbolic sprinkling of brown sugar water around the altar. The red water symbolizes the blood of *Ki* and *Nyi Wirasuta* and the meaning of life. After that, the residents scramble for the fragments of the chicken, which are believed to bring blessings and safety. This tradition of scrambling for blessings is similar to other agrarian rituals in Java, such as *Sedekah Bumi* or *Grebeg Mulud*, which emphasize the values of sharing and social solidarity. In Geertz's (1973) perspective, this action reflects rituals as a symbolic system that reinforces the community's view of life regarding the balance between humans, nature, and supernatural forces.

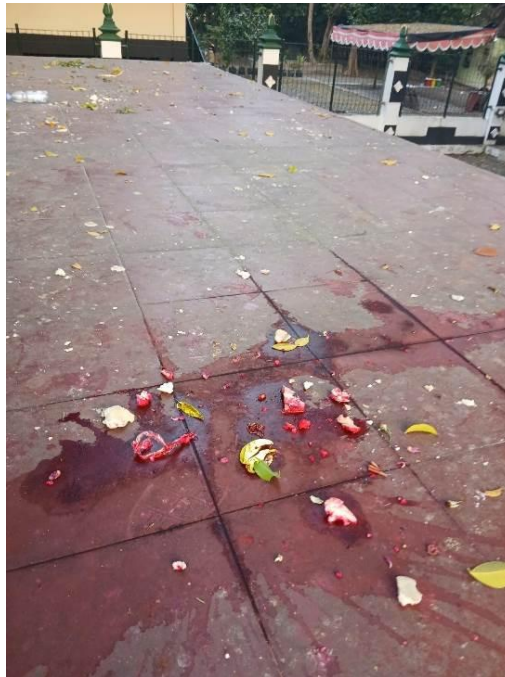


Figure 4. symbolic sprinkling of brown sugar water around the altar

After the peak of the slaughter, the activity continued with a closing prayer led by local religious leaders. The prayer was recited in two languages, Arabic and Javanese, as a symbol of the fusion of Islamic values and local traditions. The prayer ended with the scattering of flowers and the burning of incense as a final sign of respect to Ki and Nyi Wirasuta. The ceremony then closed with the distribution of tumpeng to all residents and guests in attendance.



Figure 6. closing prayer led by local religious leaders.

The next stage is the village feast and slametan, which is the strongest form of social interaction. Each hamlet prepares special dishes, such as ingkung ayam (chicken cooked in coconut milk), urap (spicy coconut salad), opor (chicken cooked in coconut milk), and jenang abangan (sticky rice cooked in coconut milk). Residents sit together regardless of social status, signifying the principle of equality. During this moment, social values—harmony, mutual cooperation, and tepa selira (mutual respect)—are naturally internalized through eating together. According to Turner's theory (1969), this phase describes the return of society to its old social structure after passing through a liminal phase.

After the feast is over, the community engages in folk entertainment such as wayang kulit (leather puppet show), ketoprak (traditional theater), and karawitan (traditional music). This event serves as a form of spiritual recreation and a medium of cultural education for the younger generation. The wayang performances often feature themes of loyalty and sacrifice, symbolically reminiscent of Ki and Nyi Wirasuta's devotion to Sultan Hamengkubuwono I. In this case, the educational and moral aspects of tradition become a means of transmitting values across generations.

2. Symbolic Interactionism in the Saparan Bekakak ceremony

The symbolic meaning in the Saparan Bekakak traditional ceremony cannot be understood separately from the social context that gave birth to it. According to the theory of Symbolic Interactionism proposed by Herbert Blumer (1969), meaning is not attached to objects, but is created through the process of interaction between individuals. The Bekakak, as a glutinous rice doll, is not an inanimate object, but rather the result of social interpretation that is continuously reproduced each time the ceremony is held. In interviews with traditional leaders in Ambarketawang, the community views the Bekakak as a “human representative” that mediates their relationship with God and their ancestors. Here, symbolic actions such as making, parading, and “slaughtering” bekakak reflect spiritual and social communication that reinforces their worldview of balance and safety (Blumer, 1969; Suyanto, 2019, *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, 14[2]).

Furthermore, this ceremony can also be understood through the concept of ritual as a symbolic act as proposed by Clifford Geertz (1973) in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. For Geertz, ritual is a symbolic system that articulates a community's worldview. Bekakak and the entire Saparan procession are not merely ceremonial activities, but representations of Javanese cosmology: humans, nature, and God must live in harmony. The symbol of bekakak unites spiritual elements (prayers and respect for ancestors) with social elements (mutual cooperation and solidarity). This is in line with Dewi's (2020) research in the *Humaniora Journal*, which found that symbolism in traditional Javanese ceremonies functions as a medium of cultural communication to maintain values of togetherness amid social change.

The social interactions that take place during the ceremony also demonstrate the principle of “meaning through interaction” which is at the core of Blumer's theory. Joint preparations, the making of bekakak, and the procession become spaces where the community negotiates and collectively interprets their actions. The process of mutual assistance among residents shows how the meaning of togetherness is not explicitly stated, but is manifested in concrete actions. This is where rituals become an arena for the formation of social solidarity. This finding is in line with Turner's (1969) research in *The Ritual Process*, which refers to the

“liminal” phase in rituals as a space without hierarchy where the community experiences *communitas*—a sense of egalitarian brotherhood.

The forms of nonverbal communication that emerge in ceremonies, such as color symbols, gamelan rhythms, and processions, also contain complex symbolic meanings. The yellow color of the palm leaves symbolizes prosperity and prayer, the sound of the gamelan creates a sacred atmosphere, while the procession on foot to Mount Gamping signifies the community's spiritual journey. In Erving Goffman's (1959) perspective, these actions are a performance of self, in which the community “displays” their social identity before an audience. The ceremony becomes a social stage that displays cultural values, as well as a means of negotiating identity amid interactions between local residents and tourists.

From Randall Collins' (2004) perspective, this ceremony can also be understood through the concept of Interaction Ritual Chains (IRC), which is a series of ritual gatherings that generate shared emotional and symbolic energy. Every year, when Saparan Bekakak is held, the Ambarketawang community experiences a renewed sense of identity and social cohesion. Shared emotional experiences—such as pride, emotion, and gratitude—become a collective energy that keeps this tradition alive. This is a tangible form of ritual solidarity, namely social solidarity that is strengthened through repeated symbolic actions. Research by Situngkir & Prasetyo (2015) in the Indonesian Journal of Social Sciences also confirms that folk traditions in Indonesia contain economic and social values that support each other through communal participation.

Furthermore, the aspect of cross-generational cultural meaning reproduction is important in maintaining the sustainability of this ceremony. The involvement of the younger generation is not only ceremonial, but also a process of cultural education (enculturation). They learn to understand symbolic values, such as the meaning of sacrifice and togetherness, through direct involvement in the procession. In this case, social interaction becomes an effective means of cultural learning. As stated by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) in his concept of habitus, cultural habits and values are instilled through repeated social practices, thereby creating a collective identity that is resistant to external change. The younger generation of Ambarketawang thus becomes agents of preservation who bridge tradition and modernity.

In addition to its social significance, this ceremony also has a symbolic economic dimension, in which community participation generates a unique local economic circulation. During Saparan Bekakak, trading activities increase; residents sell food, souvenirs, and agricultural products around the ceremony site. However, these economic activities do not diminish the sacred value of the tradition. On the contrary, it becomes part of a ritual of solidarity in which economic gains are interpreted as a shared blessing. This phenomenon is in line with Karl Polanyi's (1944) analysis of the embedded economy, namely an economy that is embedded in social and cultural structures, rather than standing alone. In the context of Ambarketawang, the symbolic and spiritual economies support each other to maintain the sustainability of the ceremony.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of research on Symbolic Interactionism in the Saparan Bekakak Traditional Ceremony in Ambarketawang Village, Gamping District, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, it can be concluded that this ceremony is not only an annual ritual tradition, but also a manifestation of the social, spiritual, and cultural values of the local

community. Through various symbols such as bekakak dolls, processions, and communal prayers, the community not only carries out customary obligations but also builds symbolic communication with each other and with the universe. This tradition serves as a medium for expressing gratitude, maintaining cosmic balance, and strengthening the collective identity of the Ambarketawang community.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969), each stage of the ceremony shows that meaning does not arise intrinsically from objects or symbols, but is formed through an intense process of social interaction. The preparations, the making of the bekakak, and the procession become an arena for shared interpretation, a place where residents negotiate the meanings and values they hold. Thus, Saparan Bekakak functions as a social mechanism that continuously reproduces solidarity and togetherness through symbolic actions that are repeated every year. This ritual proves that in traditional Javanese society, relationships between individuals are closely intertwined through a symbolic language that is understood collectively and emotionally.

Furthermore, this study confirms that Saparan Bekakak has a high adaptability amid the tide of modernization. This tradition remains alive not because of its conservative nature, but because of its ability to adapt to changing social contexts. The involvement of the younger generation, the role of traditional leaders, and the support of the local government show that cultural heritage can be a source of social strength if managed in a participatory manner. Through the perspective of symbolic interactionism, this tradition can be understood as a form of dynamic cultural communication—connecting the past and the present, the sacred and the profane, and individuals and communities in a single, living, and evolving social meaning.

The results of this study provide a number of important implications for the community and cultural policy makers at the local and national levels. The local government and the Ambarketawang community are expected to continue their efforts to preserve Saparan Bekakak through educational activities, digital documentation, and cultural festivals that maintain sacred values and local ethics. Preserving traditions requires attention not only to the ceremonial aspects, but also to cultural education so that younger generations understand the philosophical meaning behind each symbol and procession. In this way, the ceremony can continue to be a space for social and spiritual learning for the community.

For academics and researchers, this study is expected to open opportunities for further research on symbolism and social interaction in other local traditions in Indonesia. The symbolic interactionism approach has proven effective in revealing the dynamics of meaning, social processes, and the role of culture in maintaining community identity. Interdisciplinary research combining sociology, anthropology, and communication science can enrich our understanding of how traditional communities interpret social change through rituals. By maintaining continuity in research and preservation, the Saparan Bekakak tradition will remain alive as a cultural heritage and a reflection of a nation that values harmony, togetherness, and spirituality.

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