

## *Larung Sesaji* at Ngebel Lake: Dialectics of ‘Urf with Local Culture from the Perspective of Ulama in Ponorogo, East Java

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### Abstract

Traditions in religious life sometimes cause problems in society. The role of religious experts is very important in solving this problem. This study aims to analyze the tradition of *larung Sesaji* and the views of religious figures in Ponorogo regarding this procession. This study is qualitative research in which the data were collected from field research. For analysis, descriptive methods with a phenomenological approach are applied. The research results show that the tradition of *larung sesaji* in Ngebel Lake, with its various kinds of knick-knacks, is passed down from generation to generation as an accumulation of pre-Islamic customs. This tradition was originally a prayer for safety from the disaster caused by the supernatural ruler of Ngebel Lake. In response to this, the puritan Ulama in Ponorogo stated that *larung sesaji* is close to *shirk* (idolatry) and is considered ‘urf *fāsīd*, so there is no need to practice it. While moderate ulama is more flexible, allowing the tradition to continue as usual while giving guidance so that any possibility of violations of the Shari'a can be anticipated; hence, it is considered ‘urf *ṣāhib*. However, as a consequence of the Constitutional Court Decision No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016 regarding believers with no belief to not include their religion on KTP (ID Card), people around Ngebel Lake have converted their faith (apostates). Eventually, this tradition and practice are beyond the authority of the MUI and ulama.

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*Tradisi dalam kehidupan beragama terkadang menimbulkan permasalahan dalam masyarakat. Peran para ahli agama sangat penting dalam menyelesaikan permasalahan ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tradisi larung sesaji dan pandangan tokoh agama di Ponorogo mengenai prosesi ini. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif yang datanya diperoleh dari penelitian lapangan. Untuk analisis, metode deskriptif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi diterapkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tradisi larung sesaji di Telaga Ngebel, dengan berbagai macam pernak-perniknya, diwariskan secara turun-temurun dari generasi ke generasi sebagai akumulasi dari adat istiadat pra-Islam. Tradisi ini pada awalnya merupakan doa untuk memohon keselamatan dari bencana yang disebabkan oleh penguasa gaib Telaga Ngebel. Menanggapi hal ini, ulama puritan di Ponorogo menyatakan bahwa larung sesaji dekat dengan syirik dan termasuk 'urf fāsid, sehingga tidak perlu dilakukan. Sementara ulama moderat lebih fleksibel, membiarkan tradisi tersebut berjalan seperti biasa sambil memberikan panduan agar kemungkinan pelanggaran syariat dapat diantisipasi, sehingga dianggap sebagai 'urf ṣāḥib. Namun, sebagai konsekuensi dari Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016 tentang penghayat kepercayaan untuk tidak mencantumkan agamanya di KTP, masyarakat di sekitar Telaga Ngebel banyak yang berpindah agama (murtad). Pada akhirnya, tradisi dan praktik ini berada di luar kewenangan MUI dan ulama.*

**Keywords:** *larung sesaji*; religious figures; traditions

## Introduction

The traditional *larung sesaji* ceremony at Ngebel Lake is a form of local culture in the Ponorogo Regency area, East Java Province, Indonesia. Until now, the community still carries out this traditional ceremony because they feel it still has a role in their lives. The traditional *larung sesaji* Ngebel Lake ceremony is held annually, according to the Javanese calendar, which falls on the first of Sura (Harsono & Santoso, 2016). The aim of this ceremony, apart from being an expression of gratitude to Almighty God for all the blessings He has bestowed, is also a form of preserving culture passed down from generation to generation. It also has a special aim and purpose: asking for salvation.

Human salvation depends on the harmony of his relationship with God and nature. Efforts to create a harmonious relationship between God and nature later became a tradition and local wisdom of the Ponorogo people (ICRS, 2020). According to Javanese cultural areas, Ponorogo is influenced by Javanese Matraman and Panaragan culture (Sutarto & Sudikan, 2004).

Some people who live around Ngebel Lake believe that annually, the supernatural ruler of Ngebel Lake asks for a sacrifice, which could be human life. Incidents of people drowning, accidents by road users whose cars suddenly went straight into Ngebel Lake, and the like are considered forms of sacrificial demands (Sholehan, interview, July 19, 2019).

Islam historically entered the Ponorogo Regency area around the 14th century; at that time, the beliefs of Animism and Hinduism were rife in this area (Abdulgani, 1983; Nasir, 2019). The Ponorogo Regency area at that time was still called the Wengker area, which was geographically located to the southeast of Mount Lawu. The Wengker Kingdom, the forerunner of the Ponorogo district, is not widely known to the public due to the lack of discussions regarding the existence of this kingdom in history lessons. The Wengker Kingdom began with a migration of people from Central Java to East Java, led by the Medang king Kettu Wijaya. This group stopped to the east of Mount Lawu and then founded a kingdom called Wengker, which comes from the word Wewengkon Angker, which means a haunted place (Purwowijoyo, 1998).

Wengker's change to Ponorogo began when Bathoro Katong already controlled the area, so Raden Bathoro Katong discussed with his assistants, namely, Kyai Mirah, Selo Aji, and Joyodipo on Friday during the full moon, in a field near a dune (Katongan area now). In the deliberation, it was agreed that the city to be founded would be called "Pramana Raga," which eventually changed to Ponorogo. Pramana Raga consists of two words: Pramana, which means power, the secret of life, while Raga means the body (Soemarto, 2019; Tyas, 2018).

As in other places in the archipelago, Islam in Ponorogo is a collection of expressions of faith, doctrine, rituals, and other things that are practiced by the community following local traditions or place and time along with its development and spread (Sumbulah, 2012). Ponorogo is a part of Java, as the Javanese people have religious traditions passed down from generation to generation. This tradition manifests a strong belief in customs and the community's response to natural and supernatural forces. These customs

contain religious meanings for their supporters, and people would gain a sense of security and inner peace if they carried them out (Hanif & Zulianti, 2012). Therefore, for Javanese people, traditional ceremonies, salvation rituals, or *sesaji* are events that have been familiar since birth. Every newborn Javanese person is introduced to the ritual of celebrating birth with all its *ubo rampe* (equipment) (Giri, 2010).

Being dependent on belief, humans cannot live without mythology or a system of explanations about nature and life whose truth cannot be questioned anymore. So, in sequence, intact mythology will produce a complete belief system, intact belief system will produce a complete value system. Then, intact value system itself will give humans clarity about what is good and evil (ethics) and underlies all their activities in creating civilization. Religion is a reflection of God's will, conceptually divine and absolute. However, when it comes down to humans, it becomes relative, depending on human background and abilities. Therefore, understanding or understanding religious messages will differ from one person to another (Setiyawan, 2012).

According to the beliefs of the people of Ponorogo living around Ngebel Lake, Ngebel Lake is a ghostly or haunted place. This is supported by the folklore about the lake's origins, which is then strengthened by unreasonable events that often occur in said lake. Therefore, the local community holds a ceremony in the form of *larung sesaji* or *tumpeng agung* as a spiritual means of asking Allah, the Almighty, to reject any disaster.

This article attempts to reveal how the *larung sesaji* ritual is carried out and the views of Ponorogo religious leaders regarding the implementation of the *larung sesaji* at Ngebel Lake. The benefit of this research is to understand the implementation of *larung sesaji*, which is a tradition for the community around Lake Ngebel, and to find out how religious leaders in Ponorogo view this ritual. Similar research has been carried out, among others, by Rusmawati and Suharti describe the goals and objectives of the *larungan* ceremony, its procession, and its benefits for the supporting community (Rusmawati & Suharti, 2017). Research conducted by Rini Widastuti and

Aris Wuryantoro reveal the symbols used in Larungan in Ngebel Lake, Ponorogo Regency, East Java (Widastuti & Wuryantoro, 2015).

The data used as a reference in this paper originated from primary and secondary references. The primary reference is from interviews with religious figures in Ponorogo and related figures. The secondary reference used in this article comes from several journals and articles containing the ritual of *larung sesaji*. After the data has been collected, it will be analyzed and reviewed using the field research method, which is then hoped to produce accurate data. Therefore, this article can provide benefits and be used as additional insight for readers and researchers of religion and Islamic law.

### *Larung Sesaji*

*Larung* in Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia is defined as letting something drift away or be swept away (KBBI, n.d.). *Sesaji* manifests people's strong intentions and feelings to be closer to the God they believe in. *Sesaji* is a symbol of communication with elements of spiritual magic (Huda et al., 2017).

*Sesaji* comes from the word *sajen*, which means "food filled with flowers to be served to the spirits." *Sajen* is a form of spiritual practice. Humans certainly want a calm, harmonious life and do not want to experience disturbances. To achieve this, they carry out spiritual practices called *Sajen* or *Sesaji* in the hope that those who control (Javanese, *baurekso*) certain places will not disturb them and cause disasters (Adiansyah, 2017). The *sesaji* parade at Ngebel Lake is one of the annual tourist attractions that is the mainstay of the Ponorogo district government. Larungan is a form of *slametan* or salvation in Javanese tradition. Slametan represents the core of Javanese religious ritual, which is influenced by mutual beliefs between Animism, Hinduism, and Javanese mysticism (Geertz, 1960).

Ngebel Lake is a natural lake located at the foot of Mount Wilis, more precisely in Ngebel Village, Jenangan District, Ponorogo Regency, East Java. Its strategic location, the fact that it is not far from the city center of Ponorogo, and its cool air make this lake one of the tourist destinations of

choice for local and foreign tourists (Putri & Nugraha, 2017). Apart from the cool air with an average temperature of 20-26 degrees Celsius and its natural beauty, Ngebel Lake has become a tourist destination because the Ngebel area is a fruit-producing center, especially durian fruit. The people around Ngebel Lake are still strong in their ancestral beliefs. The legendary story influences this belief passed down from generation to generation about the occurrence of Lake Ngebel. Therefore, even though they embrace Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, or other religions, they are still influenced by beliefs that are Javanese in nature, especially when groups of believers file a lawsuit with the constitutional court regarding the judicial review of Law NO 23 of 2006 and Law Number 24 of 2013. It was granted, and they received protection (MKRI, 2017).

Apart from its beautiful and natural tourist attractions, an annual ceremony has become one of the local traditions at Ngebel Lake, influenced by ancestral beliefs, namely *Larung Sesaji* or *Larung Buceng (tumpeng) Agung*. This *larungan* ritual changed its name, namely *larung sesaji*, then became *Larung Risalah*, and was again called *larung sesaji*. It was motivated by dialogue between the elements of society based on ideology, belief, and religion, namely the Javanese and Muslim communities.

This annual ceremony marks the entry of the new Hijriyah year; apart from being a form of cultural tourism and preserving a culture passed down from generation to generation, it also has other aims and objectives. The people around Ngebel Lake believe that Ngebel Lake is a ghostly or haunted place, which is supported by folklore about the origins of Ngebel Lake. Also, accidents often occur that claim lives at the lake, which happens almost every year. Therefore, the local community holds a ceremony in the form of *larung sesaji* or Tumpeng Agung as a spiritual means of begging God Almighty to repel or reject the disaster. Then, the *larung sesaji* or *tumpeng agung* is now an official part of the Grebeg Suro activity agenda carried out by the Ponorogo Regency government. This *sesaji* ceremony is divided into two parts, namely, the *sesaji* ceremony at night and the *sesaji* ceremony in the morning. On the evening before the first of Suro, which is considered the sacred month marking the entry of the 1st of the Hijriyah in the Islamic

calendar, the *Larungan Sesaji* or *Buceng Agung*, along with its *ubo rampe* is performed in the middle of Ngebel Lake. Meanwhile, in the morning, a ceremonial event was held to mark the peak of the Grebeg Suro event, and the *Larungan Sesaji* or *Buceng Agung* was also held in the middle of Ngebel Lake.

The ritual is started by slaughtering a *kendhit* goat: usually a black-coated or brown-coated goat with a white or black “ring” on its stomach that resembles a belt. *Kendhit* goat is considered as a representation of people who indulge on their desires and lust. Hence, by slaughtering said *kendhit* goat, the people of Ngebel intend to steer clear from the aforementioned indulgence. At the pier of the lake is buried the head of *kendhit* together with other *sesaji* (offerings), and its meat is distributed to the local population as a donation (Putra et al., 2017).

For the general public in Ngebel village, carrying out this traditional ceremony is very helpful for maintaining unity and cooperation between themselves. The *Larung Sesaji* Ngebel Lake traditional ceremony procession begins with a *sesaji* procession as a giant *tumpeng* guarded by *paraga*. It then departs from the Ngebel District office to the ceremony venue in a small pavilion located on the eastern edge of Ngebel Lake, approximately 300 meters away. The procession of *sesaji* of the Larung Risalah Doa is accompanied by dancers and Reog art. Arriving at the ceremony location, *sesaji* are placed in front of the pavilion. After that, the event begins with a Gambyong dance performance to welcome the guests, then continues with remarks from the Head of Ngebel District, which contain a brief history of the existence of Ngebel Lake and the traditional *larung sesaji* ceremony at Ngebel Lake, as well as the purpose of holding this traditional ceremony. The ceremony is then followed by a prayer delivered by officers from the Ngebel District Religious Affairs Office (Yuliamalia, 2019).

When the ritual is taking place, paraded is *sesaji* with its *ubo rampe*, which takes shape as: 1) *tumpeng* (mountain-shaped rice) with five packages of *nasi golong* (rice wrapped by banana leaves with chicken eggs filling); 2) long beans; 3) eggs; 4) roasted chicken (with smooth red colour); 5) a bundle

of banana *raja*; 6) myrrh; 7) *takir cok bakal* (a set of offerings); 8) red and white *jenang* (a kind of rice pudding); 9) banana *ambon*; 10) *jenang tolak balak*; 11) a set of tools for *penginangan* (a kind of traditional chewing tobacco), consists of betel, *gambir*, chalk, *jambe*, and clove; 12) glutinous rice *jenang*; 13) flowers of seven colors; 14) four legs of *kendit* goat; 15) the head of *kendit* goat; and 16) blood of *kendit* goat wrapped in ritualistic cloth of *larungan* which is done twice: in the night before the 1st of Muharram and the morning the next day at 10 o'clock. By the night before the 1st of Muharram, torches are set along the way at Ngebel lake to light the road. 40 elderlies of *Perkumpulan Ayu Mardi Utama* (PAMU) gather at the district to carry out the *tirakatan* (a part of the ritual) (Putra et al., 2017).

After completing the *tirakatan* ritual, the elders bury four goat legs in several areas considered sacred. Said areas are Bebung cave, Nyai Latung cave, Kumambang cave (which now is submersed under the water), and a cave located at the edge of the lake which was used as a resting place by King Brawijaya V when his enemies pursued him. At the same time, Sakun, responsible for floating the *sesaji* into the lake's center, swims while holding the *sesaji* (Putra et al., 2017).

Arriving in the middle of the lake, the *sesaji* floated or sunk into Ngebel Lake. Along with the sinking of the *sesaji*, the annual *larung sesaji* ritual at Ngebel Lake has finished, and the hope that the prayers offered together with the *sesaji* will be answered by God Almighty (Rusmawati & Suharti, 2017; Yuliamalia, 2019). The ritual then is resumed the next morning at the 1st of Muharram.

While the *sesaji* are paraded around the lake, guests and visitors are entertained with the Reog Ponorogo performance. Reog Ponorogo is a traditional dance which is characteristic of Ponorogo Regency and has become a world heritage.

## Views of Ponorogo Ulama

Islam came down with an excellent teaching theme, namely *rahmatan li' l ālamīn* - the bringer of mercy and goodness to the entire universe". Islam



descended into cultured Arab society, resulting in a struggle between Islam and its civilization, customs, and social system. This struggle does not mean the total eradication of Arab culture. In the period of the prophet, when the process of *tashri'* was underway, not all Arab traditions were eliminated. Some traditions and social systems of pre-Islamic Arab society remain valid and have been adapted into Islam (Minhaji, 2008).

Customs as a process of social dialectics and natural creativity of human beings should not be eliminated, exterminated, or considered a dangerous enemy; instead, it should be considered an element that needs to be adopted selectively and proportionally. A tradition or a custom, individual or collective, can be used as an enhancing tool for Shari'a law. (Haq et al., 2017). The adaptation from pre-Islam customs into Islamic teachings can be observed in several religious practices, as in hajj, circumcision, *qurban*, and *'aqīqah*. This shows that Islamic teachings is adaptable, cooperative, and does not forcefully erase the pre-existing customs.

Islam views culture, traditions, and customs as things that have the force of law. However, one should understand that customs are not a juridical base or autonomous methodological tool that produces new laws. Customs are not postulate that is standing on its own and can make new legal products; instead, it is merely an ornament that limits the Shari'a law (al-Būrñū, 2002). Al-Suyūṭī had determined that customs available for Shari'a legitimacy are those that do not possess Shari'a limitation nor linguistic limitation; it means that Shari'a law only provides general regulations and the exact limitation belongs to the existing customs (al-Suyūṭī, 1998; al-Zarkashī, 2000).

Uṣūl al-Fiqh defines *'urf* as a custom in an area already in effect. It can be used as a consideration in establishing laws (Harisudin, 2017) as in one of the fiqh rules often used in answering various questions regarding customary law in society, namely *al-'ādah al-muḥakkamah* (custom can be used as a legal benchmark). The rule is one of the five main rules in studying fiqh rules (al-Suyūṭī, 1998).

From this factor, Islam, in its various forms of teachings, considers customs or *'urf* as partners and elements that must be adopted selectively and proportionally to be used as a supporting tool for Sharia laws, not as a basis. It is a juridical law that stands alone and will give birth to new legal products. Still, it is only an ornament to legitimize Sharia laws in accordance with a perspective that does not conflict with Sharia texts (Minhaji, 2008). Al-Zarqa believes that 'custom is more general. Generally, it includes the concept of *'urf* (al-Zarqa', 1989; Ismail et al., 2022).

On the other hand, Sharia law must always be responsive to various problems faced with constructive and solutive answers because problems will always arise (*lā tantahī*). At the same time, the texts of The Qur'an and hadith have stopped (al-Shahrastanī, n.d.). Al-Qarafi even required Mujtahid scholars to know about the *'urf* traditions of the community before giving a fatwa so that the fatwa would provide *maslahah* (al-Qarafi, 1344).

With the cessation of revelation, the problems that arise require a solution with the concept of *ijtihād*. Therefore, the existence of ulama as relay holders of the prophet's struggle, as well as legal experts, plays a vital role in resolving the contemporary problems of the people through *ijtihād* (Lapidus, 1967). There are four duties of ulama as heirs of the prophet, namely: *tablīgh*/conveying Islamic teachings (Fāṭir: 32 ), *tabyīn*/explaining vague things about Islamic teachings (al-Nahl: 44), *taḥkīm*/deciding cases (al-Baqarah: 213) and *uswah*/being a role model for the people (al-Ahzāb: 21) (Muhtarom, 2005).

*Larung sesaji*, as one of the problems that exist in society and need a solution as an answer to its existence, certainly requires the role of Ponorogo ulama figures. *Larung sesaji* at Ngebel Lake is a traditional ceremony passed down for generations and has its own characteristics from other areas because it is existing stories or tales influence it. Traditional ceremonies in an area cannot be separated from historical elements (Saddhono et al., 2019).

The people around Ngebel Lake and Ponorogo, in general, see that the tradition of *larung sesaji* is a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved.

This can be seen during the procession of *larung sesaji*. The people of Ponorogo flocked to Ngebel Lake to take part in the procession of *larung sesaji*, and of course, this will have an influence on improving the economy of the community around Ngebel Lake. However, *larung sesaji* raises a problem related to the law regarding this activity.

Therefore, the existence and role of Ponorogo religious figures is very urgent. The role of the ulama as successors of the prophet is always needed by society to determine the answer for every problem. The spirit of the prophetic teachings attributed by *rahmah* (blessed) is the characteristic of Islam, and that blessed attribute is not limited by time: it can always transpire until the end of time.

Ashmawi determined that when Prophet Muhammad passed away, the authority of the law was transferred from Allah to the human being since the connection between the heaven and the earth was severed, divine principals and religious guidance were also stopped. In other words, those principals only took place when Prophet Muhammad was alive and they then ended when he passed away. Ashmawi considered that the practical side of the principals of the Shari'a law is temporary, not permanent, and does not last forever, since laws are a product of a particular time which took place as a response to a practical event of its society. Therefore, it is not surprising that public laws are tightly connected with the local public events. If the events that trigger the formation of the laws have changed, then it is only logical that a new *ijtihad* (the effort to solve a problem) is to be done to respond to recent events (al-'Ashmāwī, 1988).

Ulama or religious authority figures who possess the authoritative rights are entitled and worthy of carrying out the *ijtihad*. Therefore, the existence and role of Ponorogo religious figures is very urgent. Ponorogo religious figures or ulama are members of the Ponorogo branch of the Indonesian Ulama Council and are required to be able to resolve legal issues related to the *sesaji*. The opinions of religious figures in Ponorogo regarding this tradition are varied, including those expressed by Solehan, who said:

“The people around Ngebel Lake used to believe that after the *sesaji* were held, the rulers or leaders of Ngebel Lake would not be angry so that disasters

such as accidents involving sacrifices would not happen again. Things like this need to be straightened out to avoid acts of shirk, and this is the task of religious leaders or the MUI. So, as time passes and society's understanding improves, such beliefs will disappear. Like the previous belief that *sesaji* was necessary, now *sesaji* only serves as a symbol of cultural preservation and has become a tourist attraction (Sholehan, interview, July 19, 2019).

On the other hand, the chairman of the Ponorogo branch of the Indonesian Ulama Council, said:

“On the agenda is *larung sesaji* at Ngebel Lake. It is necessary to know that *sesaji* has been around since immemorial times. The perpetrators or those carrying out the *larung sesaji* are not Muslims. If they were Muslims, of course, we would forbid it, but those who do it are believers. They can check their identity card (KTP). “If they are no longer Muslims, if we then enter their territory, of course, this is not appropriate, because it is no longer MUI territory” (Anshor M. Rusydi, interview, May 19, 2022).

Muhamadiyah figure and MUI administrator about *larung sesaji*, said:

“The perpetrators of *sesaji* at Ngebel Lake are a group of believers. Muhammadiyah's attitude towards *sesaji* can only appeal to the community (members) that they should not carry out things that hint at polytheism. Regarding the customs and traditions of Ponorogo, which is a Matraman region, there are indeed ingrained cultures and traditions. You should be smart in your behavior and not mix up the beliefs of the Muslim community because, in reality, in *sesaji*, there are things that are close to shirk, the perpetrators of which are believers. “In principle, Muhammadiyah did not take part in carrying out the *sesaji* ceremony on the Grebeg Suro agenda, but in terms of nationality, Muhammadiyah tolerated Grebeg Suro activities” (Ahmad Munir, interview, May 22, 2022).

Ponorogo religious figures, also administrators of the Indonesian Ulama Council, are tasked with providing advice, direction, and warnings to parties to avoid actions contrary to Islamic beliefs. This is where the ulama needs to intervene in the agenda of *sesaji* so that if there are things that conflict with the Sharia, they can immediately straighten things out.

### Problematics of *Larung Sesaji* – ‘Urf

In Islamic Sharia, which is elastic and flexible, there is a concept called ‘urf. ‘Urf, according to Hanafy and Maliki, is used as one of the legal bases outside of Qur'an and Hadith. This understanding was taken from the comprehension of a hadits by Abdullah ibn Mas'ud: “*Mā ra'ā al-muslimūna*

*ḥasanan fahuwa ‘inda-llāhi ḥasanun*” (if something is seen by the Muslims as good, then it is also good in the eyes of Allah). This hadits explicitly gives the understanding that positive perspective of the Muslims to a question can be a basic footing that it has positive value in the eyes of Allah. Hence, it does not need to be disputed or brushed off, instead it can be used as a pedestal for designing a legal product. It is due to the fact that that judgement does not contradict the divine will of Allah. Besides, the aforementioned hadits affirms to the condition that the Muslims are given the authority to design the laws that were not yet detailed at the time of the Prophet (Haq et al., 2017; Zahrah, 2011).

‘*Urf* is something that has become a habit repeated over and over again and is considered to be something good and can be in the form of actions or words. ‘*urf*, which is defined as “*al-amru al-mukararu min ghayri ‘alāqatin ‘aqliyyatin*” (something that is done repeatedly without any relationship of rationality) (ash-Shiddieqy, 2000; Haroen, 1997). Abu Zahrah added that ‘*urf* can be used as a legal footing if it was done constantly (*iṭirāz*) in the middle of the society (Zahrah, 2011). Besides that, there is also an additional requirement for ‘*urf* to be used as a legal basis: said ‘*urf* can not possibly contradict the nash (Qur’an and Hadith) so that the ‘*urf* annuls the nash; this is the main requirement (Haq et al., 2017).

‘*Urf* is sometimes *fāsid* and sometimes authentic. When the ‘*urf* does not make lawful what is haram and forbid what is halal, then in general the ‘*urf* is classified as ‘*ṣaḥīb*’ *urf*. On the other hand, if the ‘*urf* makes lawful what is haram and forbids what is halal, then it is included in ‘*urf* as false and rejected (al-Makki, 2004; Nasution, 2001). Something is not said to be ‘*urf* if it is not yet in force and has become a common practice. Al-Qurtubi added that ‘*urf* is something that is considered reasonable by the mind and after carrying it out there is peace of mind (Ismā’īl, n.d.).

Something that has become customary - ‘*urf* can be used as proof if: (1) There is no evidence in the text that discusses explicitly the theme, (2) its enactment does not create any problems or difficulties, and (3) it has become generally accepted and is not only carried out by just a few people (Dahlan, 2010; Djazuli, 2005).

Islamic Laws based on 'urf will change according to changes in time and place, because *furū'* (branch) laws will change according to changes in the Usul-original law. In essence, the application of Islamic laws based on 'urf is basically based on the concept of *maṣlahah mursalah*. And this will change along with changes in time and place. As in the mazhab Shāfi'ī (Shāfi'ī school of thought) there is *Qawl Qadīm* and *Qawl Jadīl*. That is when Imām Shāfi'ī before moving to Egypt, was still in Baghdad and after moving to Egypt (Khalāf, 1978).

The *sesaji* at Ngebel Lake is one of the traditions that has become a special icon for Ngebel Lake in the month of Suro. The legendary story about the beginning of the formation of Ngebel Lake is inseparable, namely the story of Baru Klinting, a snake who became the ruler of the area. The people around Ngebel Lake then believed that the ruler or Mbaurekso still had something to do with this story.

The beliefs of the people around the lake are a form of discretism from pre-Islamic beliefs, which in the history of Ponorogo, pre-Islamic beliefs were Animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. This belief is synonymous with the act of worship in the form of *sesaji*. Therefore, the ritual of *sesaji* still uses various kinds of knick-knacks such as flowers and mountains, which are a form of pre-Islamic belief ritual.

When Islam came to Ponorogo, this kind of tradition was still carried out. So, the acculturation model was the da'wah pattern carried by the preachers in Ponorogo, like the Walisongo in general. Islamic acculturation does not eliminate the essence of Islamic teachings but does not eliminate traditions that already exist and are ingrained in Ponorogo. It is proven that the *larung sesaji* at Ngebel Lake begins with a prayer carried out in an Islamic manner, usually led by the chairman of the Ngebel District of Religious Affair Office (KUA).

One should pay attention that *larung sesaji* was started with the salughtering of the *kendit* goat. It is tightly connected with the belief of the people of Ponorogo, which majority consists of Muslims: they are worried that the deed is mixed with heretic belief. It is due to the fact that the animal is slaughtered for the sake of the supernatural guardian of the lake and not for

Allah, hence it contradicts the verse of QS. al-Mā'idah 3. In verse, "*wamā uhillā lighayri-llāhi bihi*" is there, which means that the meat of an animal slaughtered for other than Allah, or slaughtered without saying the name of Allah, is forbidden to eat (*ḥarām*). Allah requires that His name is to be spoken when one is slaughtering His creatures. Hence, any animal slaughtered with a name other than His, as in idols, *ṭaghūt*, or other entities, is forbidden to eat with the absolute agreement of the ulama (al-Ṣabūnī, 1980).

Beside that, the burial of the head of the goat with its legs in four corners of Ngebel Lake, is entering the gray area of '*aqidah*, which needs to be dealt with carefully, so that we would not end up getting lost in heresy. Therefore, since its beginning, *larung sesaji* at Ngebel lake caused plenty of arguments so that its name have been through many changes. It used to be named *Larung Risalah Do'a*, but it was rejected by the local Muslim population of Ponorogo since it does not reflect on the teachings of Islam, which then it was changed into *larung sesaji* (Putra et al., 2017).

The Ponorogo ulama has different opinions regarding this tradition of prohibiting *sesaji*. Of course, they have their reasons. For example, the ulama, who are more flexible and pliant, say that the *sesaji* are indeed close to something that is prohibited by the Shari'a, but this tradition should not be banned, but the public should be guided so that they do not fall into things that violate the Sharia. It is the task of the Indonesian Ulama Council. On the other hand, the Puritan clerics represented by Muhammadiyah took a firmer stance, forbidding members of their congregation from following the prohibition because there was an element of shirk in this activity and this was '*urf*, which is contrary to Shari'a.'

It seems that moderate ulama who are tolerant and flexible think that if '*urf* or a custom that is seen as a good thing by the people would cause unrest or difficulty, and it contradicts the verse: *Wamā ja'ala 'alaykum fi al-dīn min ḥaraj* (Allah does not make difficulties into religion). Therefore, according to Maliki and Hanafi, there is an argument that any regulation that has been legitimized based on '*urf* has the same legitimacy as one based on Shari'a law: *al-thābit bi 'l-'urfi thābitu bidalili shar'iy* (what is determined

by custom law must be determined on the basis of Shari'a law). This shows how important a role 'urf has in *istinbāt* (Zahrah, 2011).

In essence, the moderate Ponorogo ulama considers whether to reject or eliminate this ingrained tradition or allow a tradition that contains *shirk*, between *maṣlaḥah* and *mafsadat*, so they –by considering the concept of *maṣlaḥah mursalah*– allow it and continue to provide coaching supervision so that things Those that are contrary to Islamic teachings can slowly be eliminated.

Apart from these differences of opinion, many people around Ngebel Lake, according to the chairman of the MUI Ponorogo, are no longer Muslim. It aligns with the lawsuit for judicial review of Law No. 23 of 2006 and Law No. 24 of 2013 concerning Civil Administration. The lawsuit was granted by the Constitutional Court with Decision No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016. With this decision, believers do not need to include a religion column in their population card, meaning they are no longer Muslims (Dukcapil Prov. Kalbar, 2019; MKRI, 2017).

After this decision, many people around Ngebel Lake came to the Department of Population and Civil Registration to change their Identity Cards (KTP). With the change in religious status from Islam on the Population Identification Card, the MUI no longer has the authority to provide guidance. So, if they carry out the *larung sesaji* activity with the belief that it would violate the shari'ah law, then the MUI has no right to intervene. It means that the decision of the Supreme Court (Supreme Court) Number 97/PUU-XIV/2016 has removed the doubts of the people around Telaga Ngebel about their religious status because they are on their KTP (ID Card) it is written that Islam is their religion, but they do things that are prohibited in Islam, they violate the limits of '*aqidah*.

For the people of Ngebel Lake who choose to continue to include Islam on their ID cards, it is the responsibility of the Ponorogo Ulama Council to guide, mentor, and supervise because they are close to the heretical teachings mentioned above.



## Conclusion

This research concludes that *larung sesaji* is a tradition of acculturation with pre-Islamic traditions carried out on 1 Sura. Before being paraded around and floated in the middle of the lake, *Sesaji* is prayed for in an Islamic way. According to Ponorogo Ulama, this kind of tradition contains elements of *shirk* - '*urf fāsīd*, because there is recognition of the power of the *telaga* ruler, and the *larungan* is a form of peace, even a request for safety. Therefore, this puritan ulama figure urges his congregation not to take part in this activity. Moderate ulama stated that the *larung sesaji* was ingrained in society. Consequently, it wasn't easy to stop. What needs to be done is coaching them so that things that are not in accordance with the '*urf fāsīd* (bad tradition) can be corrected so that they become '*urf* that is *ṣaḥīḥ* (good tradition).[w]

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