

ARTICLE

The Changing Significance of the *Gerebeg Maulid* Tradition: An Examination of Its Socio-Economic Impact in Indonesia

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Abstract

The tradition of *Grebeg Maulid* in Yogyakarta plays a significant role within Indonesian Muslim society. It is not just a cultural identity with significances of religiosity, but also a multifaceted socio-economic phenomenon. The aim of this study is to explore how the Muslim society perceives this heritage, specifically within the socio-economic context. The study employed qualitative research methodology, utilizing observation and interviews to collect data from informants who are actively engaged in the practice. The findings indicated that *Grebeg Maulid* serves not only as a platform for religious expression, but also as a catalyst for economic endeavors and touristic aspects. Its economic impacts are clearly identified through the numerous business transactions that take place during the event, providing a boost to the local tourism industry. However, the commercialization of this tradition has changed its meaning, with economic values overshadowing its religious significance. In a nutshell, the significance of *Grebeg Maulid* has undergone a significant change within Javanese Muslim culture. It has evolved beyond being solely a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth and now serves as a hub for tourism and commercial endeavors in the community.

Keywords: *Prophetic Leadership; Kuntowijoyo; Indonesian Muslim Society*

Tradisi Grebeg Maulid di Yogyakarta dalam kehidupan masyarakat Muslim di Indonesia, tidak hanya sebagai simbol budaya dengan makna religius, tetapi juga sebagai fenomena sosial ekonomi yang kompleks. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali pemaknaan masyarakat Muslim terhadap tradisi ini, khususnya dalam konteks sosial ekonomi. Penelitian dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, adapun pengumpulan data melalui proses observasi dan wawancara dengan informan yang terlibat dalam tradisi tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Grebeg Maulid tidak hanya menjadi sarana untuk mengekspresikan keberagaman, tetapi juga sebagai sarana untuk aktivitas ekonomi dan pariwisata. Dimensi ekonomi dalam tradisi ini tercermin dalam bentuk transaksi ekonomi yang terjadi selama acara dan memberi dampak positif terhadap industri pariwisata setempat. Meskipun demikian, keberadaan dimensi ekonomi ini telah menggeser makna sakralitas tradisi tersebut, kebutuhan akan nilai ekonomi menjadi lebih dominan dibandingkan dengan makna religius yang melekat dalam tradisi Grebeg Maulid. Dengan kata lain, Grebeg Maulid telah mengalami transformasi makna yang signifikan bagi masyarakat Muslim Jawa, tidak lagi hanya sebagai pengingat kelahiran Nabi Muhammad, tetapi juga sebagai objek wisata dan ekonomi masyarakat.

A. INTRODUCTION

Culture and tradition are expressions of ideas, symbols, and values that reflect the belief and behavior of individuals (Daliman 2012). Expressions of religious sentiments can take on diverse forms, including the development of traditions and religious ceremonies that gradually shape customs and culture. *Grebeg* is a longstanding tradition in Indonesia that has persisted for centuries and reflects dynamic system of cultural tradition within Muslim society.

Grebeg is a tradition that has been celebrated at the Yogyakarta Palace for a long time. The word "*Grebeg*" is derived from the Javanese words "*Grebe*" or "*Gerbeg*" and "*Gumbrebeg*," which signify a loud, bustling, and lively sound akin to the wind (Yogyakarta 2012). *Grebeg* is a religious expression aligned with Islam, encompassing religious, artistic, linguistic, and customary elements. Therefore, *Grebeg* can be interpreted as an expression of gratitude in the form of sacrifices or thanksgiving (*wilujengan*, *sugengan*) by the people and the state to the Almighty God. This tradition is typically held within Islamic royal environments in Java and is adorned with rich Javanese cultural symbols (Daliman 2012).

During *Grebeg*, various symbolic structures known as "*gunungan*" are displayed. These *gunungan* symbolize prosperity and reflect the bounties of the earth in the form of vegetables, fruits, and various snacks distributed to the community (Yogyakarta 2019). *Grebeg* at the Yogyakarta Palace is held three times a year: *Grebeg Mulud* commemorating the birth of Prophet Muhammad, *Grebeg Pasa* marking Eid al-Fitr, and *Grebeg Besar* commemorating Eid al-Adha (Qurban).

Each of these *Grebegs* has its own characteristics and uniqueness. *Grebeg Mulud* includes a series of events known as "*Sekaten*," with the highlight being the reading of the *Maulid Muhammad* message by the palace's leader. On the other hand, *Grebeg Pasa* features the largest

gunungan, the "Kangkung" *gunungan* arranged in tiers, distributed to the local community. During *Grebeg Besar*, a special *gunungan* is displayed, not meant for consumption but to be kept at home (Millah et al. 2022).

Although there have been many studies conducted on *Grebeg* in Yogyakarta, the previous research has primarily concentrated on its historical development. For instance, Daliman (2012) explored the evolution of *Grebeg* ceremonies in Yogyakarta, while Renta Vulkanita Hasan (2013) described the meaning and symbolic motifs of batik fabrics used during the *Grebeg Mulud* procession at the Yogyakarta Palace. Other studies have approached the tradition from various disciplinary perspectives. Tiwi Mirawati (2016) investigated the Islamic values embedded in *Grebeg Mulud* at the Yogyakarta Palace, and Devina Pratisara (2020) interpreted *Grebeg Mulud* as a symbol of *Kejawen* Islam protected within the community from a *Pancasila* perspective. Nabila Hafizhotul Millah et al. (2022) focused on *Grebeg* traditions within Islamic education to foster better personalities and continuous faith in Allah SWT.

Although there is already a considerable amount of research on *Grebeg* in Yogyakarta, there is still a need to study *Grebeg Mulud* at the Yogyakarta Palace from a socio-economic standpoint. In terms of socio-economic development, *Grebeg Mulud* has tapped into its tourism potential. This includes the tradition of distributing food-laden *gunungans* (*pareden*) to the community and the regular night markets held at the North Square of the Yogyakarta Palace.

Hence, this research aims to explore the socio-economic significance of *Grebeg Mulud*. The author hopes this study will serve as a basis for stakeholders to formulate policies that preserve local traditions. This is crucial to identify the foundational aspects that sustain a culture within society without diluting its meaning. Thus, stakeholders, including local governments, NGOs, and the community, can devise policies to safeguard local culture.

B. METHODOLOGY

This research constitutes a field study employing a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques involve interviews and documentation. Three key informants engaged in this study are representatives from the Yogyakarta Palace, businesses surrounding the Yogyakarta Palace complex, and tourists visiting the location. The data analysis involves utilizing the descriptive method to collect factual information and portray the context of the *Grebeg Mulud* tradition at the Yogyakarta Palace (Tarjo 2019). In addition, the hermeneutic method is used to uncover the underlying significance of the gathered information, especially within the socio-economic framework of the *Grebeg Mulud* tradition.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. *Grebeg: Meaning and Its Function*

The term "Grebeg" originates from the Javanese word "Gumbrebeg," which means bustling or noisy. This noisy affair occurs when the Sultan of Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat exits the palace with a grand procession, creating a lively atmosphere. Historically, the tradition of *Grebeg* was initiated by Sultan Hamengku Buwana I (Yogyakarta Cultural Office 2012). According to Herman Beck, this tradition is conducted three times a year by both the Yogyakarta Hadiningrat Sultanate and the Surakarta Hadiningrat Kasunanan.

As Beck (2019) states, "*Grebeg*, also *Grebek*, is the Javanese term for a grand ceremony celebrated three times a year at the kratons (royal courts) of Yogyakarta, Surakarta, and Cirebon, coinciding with the three Islamic feasts of *Mawlid al-Nabī* (birthday of the Prophet), *īd al-fitr* (festival of the breaking of the fast), and *īd al-adhā* (sacrificial feast)." Each of the three *Grebeg* traditions held by the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace serves

distinct purposes. For example, *Grebeg Syawal* commemorates Eid al-Fitr every 1 Syawal. *Grebeg Besar* celebrates Eid al-Adha, while *Grebeg Mulud* is held to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (Interview with KRT. X2, representative of Penghageng Kawedanan Hageng Panitrapura Keraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, June 8, 2023).

Among these, *Grebeg Mulud* is the most elaborate ceremony, especially due to the inclusion of the *Sekaten* festival, which is a highlight for the community. *Grebeg Mulud* is held at the Masjid Gedhe Yogyakarta and begins within the Yogyakarta Palace. From the palace, the Sultan and the *pareden* (mountain of offerings) are paraded to the mosque for distribution to the attending public (Sunartono 2023). The *Grebeg Mulud* tradition comprises at least five processions: *Miyos Gangsa*, *Numplak Wajik*, *Kondur Gangsa*, *Grebeg*, and *Bedhol Songsong*. These processions are carried out sequentially and centered around the Masjid Gedhe Yogyakarta area.

The *Miyos Gangsa* procession involves parading two palace gamelan ensembles, *Kyai Gunturmadu* and *Kyai Nagawilaga*, to the Masjid Gedhe. The *Numplak Wajik* procession involves placing the *Wajik* food offering onto the *pareden*. The *Kondur Gangsa* procession is the return of the two gamelan ensembles from the Masjid Gedhe complex back to the palace. The *Hajad Dalem Grebeg* procession is the distribution of the *pareden* to the local community. Finally, the *Bedhol Songsong* procession symbolizes the end of the event with the removal of the ceremonial umbrella (Ahmad et al. 2021). The *Grebeg Mulud* tradition is deeply rooted in the Yogyakarta Palace's customs and involves the active participation of all members of society, including the local government.

In addition to the *pareden* distribution procession, there is also a night market. This night market is a major attraction for people attending the *Grebeg* activities. Essentially, the *Grebeg* tradition signifies three important aspects of the Ngayogyakarta Haidiningrat Palace's existence. Firstly, in a religious context, *Grebeg* is understood as a mandatory agenda for Sri Sultan

Hamengku Buwana to disseminate Islamic values as a consequence of his title as Sayyidin Panatagama Khalifatullah (Mirawati 2016). However, the historical significance of the *Grebeg* tradition is seen as proof of the Sultan's rightful claim as a descendant of the fourth generation of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom. Thirdly, the *Grebeg* tradition in a socio-cultural context is understood as an activity related to a Sultan as a manifestation of a Javanese king inheriting ancestral culture (Mundzirin 2009).

Fundamentally, the *Grebeg* tradition can be understood as a form of a king's responsibility to his people. A king is responsible for the welfare of the people, symbolized in this context by the distribution of the *pareden* to the community. This procession illustrates the relationship between a king and his subjects. Symbolic efforts to provide teachings are common in Javanese society (Permadi 2022).

2. Socio-economic Dimensions of the Grebek Tradition

The tradition of the *Grebeg* ceremony, originally a celebration of significant Islamic holidays, has undergone essential changes. As previously mentioned, the Yogyakarta Palace holds three *Grebeg* celebrations: *Grebeg Mulud*, *Grebeg Syawal*, and *Grebeg Besar*.

One of the processions in the *Grebeg Mulud* ceremony is the *Sekaten* procession. The *Sekaten* ceremony is a traditional event celebrated by the Javanese community to honor the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, also known as the *Maulid Nabi*. The highlight of the ceremony is the *Grebeg Mulud* event. The *Sekaten* ceremony begins with a 35-day night market, followed by performances of the heritage gamelans *Kyai Gunturmadu* and *Kyai Nagawilaga*. These gamelans are then relocated to the Great Mosque and played continuously for seven days (Nursolehah, Noor, and Rizky 2022). The climax of this ceremony is the reading of the *Maulid Nabi Muhammad* by the palace's religious leader in the Kauman Great Mosque porch.

Most people understand that the essence of the *Sekaten* procession lies in the night market held at the North Alun-Alun of the Yogyakarta Palace. Therefore, the *Sekaten* event is often associated more with the night market activities rather than the religious teachings in the Kauman Mosque. Consequently, many visitors engage in commercial transactions rather than participate in religious discussions during the *Sekaten* event.

The evolving understanding of *Sekaten* within the community could potentially diminish the core essence of the *Grebeg* tradition over time. The public may have a decreasing understanding of the original religious teachings embedded in *Sekaten*. When the emphasis moves away from the deep understanding and reverence for the history of Prophet Muhammad, as exemplified in the *Grebeg Mulud* ceremony, and becomes solely about commercial transactions, it detracts from the spiritual significance of the tradition. Moreover, the consumerist culture fostered by the night market during *Sekaten* contradicts Islamic values promoting frugality.

Another shift observed is the transformation of the *Grebeg* ceremony from a solemn *Hajad Dalem* agenda rich in sanctity to a tourism activity in Yogyakarta. This transformation occurred because the *Grebeg* or *Sekaten* ceremony has become a significant tourist attraction. Due to the promising potential of *Sekaten* as a tourist attraction, various stakeholders and the local government of Yogyakarta have become involved. This involvement ranges from licensing to maintaining order during *Sekaten* (Latif and Ahmad Ar 2021). By joining forces, purchasing power and economic activities during *Sekaten* can be boosted (Apsari 2021). This effort is reasonable considering Yogyakarta's aim to become a leading tourist destination in Asia-Africa, with the *Grebeg* tradition being one of its flagship tourism potentials (Nursalam and Syahputra 2023). According to data from the Yogyakarta Special Region Development Planning Agency, in 2023, the total number of visitors to Yogyakarta's tourist attractions reached 15,462,343,000 people (Yogyakarta Special Region Development Planning Agency 2023).

Since 2022, the night market has ceased to be part of the *Sekaten* celebration. This decision aims to restore *Sekaten*'s original purpose, which is to focus on religious teachings in the Great Mosque. Additionally, this step is part of the efforts by the Yogyakarta Palace to reinstate the North Alun-Alun of the Yogyakarta Palace as a part of the philosophical axis of the Yogyakarta Palace.

The discontinuation of the night market during *Sekaten* at the Yogyakarta Palace has had a negative impact on the income of traders and public transportation providers. Traders and service providers have experienced a decline in income as a result of the night market closure during *Sekaten*, as there has been a decrease in attendance at the event. (interview with X1, Andong Puller in the Malioboro area, July 3, 2023). This decline is because the general public has come to associate the night market with the core essence of the *Sekaten* celebration.

Muhammad Kresna Dutayana's research indicates that younger generations are less interested in the *Grebeg* or *Sekaten* traditions (Dutayana and Bustami 2022). This lack of interest stems from the more entertaining nature of the night market compared to the *Sekaten* activities, which represent the culmination of the *Grebeg* events. Considering this reality, it is crucial to provide cultural education to the broader community, especially regarding the *Grebeg* tradition. So far, the Yogyakarta Palace has been actively promoting local culture through educational initiatives, such as organizing exhibitions within its premises. (interview with X2, Volunteer at the Narawandira Exhibition at the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace, March 17, 2023).

3. *The Juxtaposition of Gerebeg and Economic Interest*

The adhesiveness is a result of social conditioning and economic actions that take place within a social network among various individuals. (Damsar and Indrayani 2015). The concept of attachment in economic sociology was first theorized by Polanyi and further developed by Granovetter in 1985. For Polanyi, various economic activities in modern society have social attachments to non-economic institutions, such as those related to religion and culture. These attachments can be strong (overembedded) or weak (underembedded) (Jamilah et al. 2016).

There are at least two concepts regarding attachment in understanding the economic behavior in the social life of a society. First is the concept of oversocialized, which states that economic behavior is culturally based, where actions are influenced by the rules of values, norms, and cultural customs internalized within an individual. Second is undersocialized, which states that economic behavior occurs rationally, oriented towards individual profit. This concept suggests that the interests of the actors are the main basis of a transaction, and culture or social structures in society do not influence the success of economic behavior (Putri and Hidayah 2019).

In economic sociology, the concept of attachment can be divided into two forms. First, we have relational attachment, which refers to the way economic behavior is influenced by social connections among economic actors. Economic behavior is socially conditioned by connecting it with political, cultural, social, and religious aspects. Second is structural attachment, defined as an attachment that arises within a broader network in society, such as in social structures. This type of attachment provides an order that can be directly used to meet basic human needs (Damsar and Indrayani 2015).

The *Grebeg* tradition held by the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace has a significant influence in Yogyakarta. Besides being a mandatory

tradition held by the Islamic Mataram Kingdom, *Grebeg* has a positive impact on both the increase in the number of tourists and the economic improvement of the local community (Nugraha 2020). This is because the *Grebeg* tradition in Yogyakarta usually includes a night market. This economic activity, on one hand, influences the number of tourists and, on the other hand, the income of the local community.

The night market activities associated with the *Grebeg* tradition at the Yogyakarta Palace, on one hand, stimulate an increase in the number of tourists and boost the local community's capital. However, on the other hand, it has become a factor in the shifting meaning of the *Grebeg* tradition. As previously explained, the lively night market aspect has led to the perception that the essence of the *Grebeg* tradition lies in the night market itself. As a result, the Yogyakarta Palace made the decision to cease the night market activities in order to restore the *Grebeg* tradition to its intended purpose.

In the field of economic sociology, the economic behavior exhibited by the community during the night market activities of the *Grebeg* tradition may occur due to the element of attachment. The concept of attachment suggests that the economic behavior of society is influenced by internalized values, social norms, and culture. The economic behavior of the community during the *Grebeg* night market activities is an example of this concept of attachment.

The socio-economic dimension of the *Grebeg* tradition in Yogyakarta is an example of oversocialized attachment. The community's perception of the culturally ingrained night market ultimately becomes a factor in the attachment to the habit of engaging in economic activities rather than listening to the recitation of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday as the highlight of the *Grebeg* tradition. The emergence of many traders in the town square area becomes a relational attachment due to the crowded conditions.

The night market activities in the *Grebeg* tradition create a strong attachment to the economic transaction culture in Yogyakarta compared to the main event, the *Sekaten*. From an economic sociology perspective, the *Grebeg* tradition has a significant impact on both the community and business actors, shaping their behavior in buying and selling transactions. Therefore, when the night market activities were eventually discontinued by the Yogyakarta Palace, there were complaints from the community. Business actors experienced a decrease in income, and visitors showed a decrease in interest.

A particular culture can survive not only because of its own existence but also because of factors outside of that culture. Culture, in its efforts to grow, goes through at least three important stages. The first stage is what is known as the Mythic Stage. In this stage, the community believes that natural phenomena are always interpreted as the intervention of supernatural beings. They assume that nature is always surrounded by metaphysical things full of mysteries.

The second stage is the Ontological Stage. In this stage, the community no longer considers all natural phenomena to be mystical; they begin to distance themselves from a culture and understand the meaning of a culture. And the third stage is the Functional Stage. In this stage, the community begins to establish relationships with other functions to support the existence of that culture.

In understanding the reasons behind the perpetuation of the *Grebeg* ceremony tradition at the Yogyakarta Palace, one can delve into the realm of mythical thinking. The *Grebeg* tradition continues to exist because the surrounding community believes that the collection of "*gunungan*" (mountains) distributed by the Sultan during the *Grebeg* tradition brings blessings. For the people of Yogyakarta, one of the attractions of the *Grebeg Mulud* tradition lies in the procession of "*gunungan*." Many people are willing to compete to take "*gunungan*," even climbing them. People who are

willing to compete and finally get "*gunungan*" do not do so for consumption; instead, they choose to make it a symbol of blessings. "*gunungan*" is understood by the people as a "magical" object that can facilitate all their efforts.

The mystical roots in Javanese culture stem from the Javanese people's understanding that a king is a figure in whom the energies of the macrocosmos and microcosmos converge (Permadi and Wahyudi 2022). It is suggested that the figure possesses great power, as indicated by the implication. When someone successfully harnesses these energies within themselves, they will attain a life that the Javanese people refer to as "*manunggaling kawulo Gusti*." (Yantari and Permadi 2023).

In the context of ontological thinking, several factors underlie the survival of the *Grebeg* tradition at the Yogyakarta Palace to this day. First, the *Grebeg* ceremony is organized by the palace as a symbolic celebration of significant days in Islam. In this context, the *Grebeg Mulud* ceremony is held as a symbolic celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. This is done because the Yogyakarta Palace is one of the descendants of the Mataram Islamic Kingdom. As an Islamic kingdom, the tradition of celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad becomes an important part of the kingdom.

Second, the *Grebeg Mulud* ceremony tradition is understood as a logical consequence of the king's title. The title held by the king of the Yogyakarta Palace is Sultan and Ngabdurrahman Sayyidin Panatagama Khalifatullah. Both titles are interpreted as a king and a person who is an envoy tasked with upholding the Islamic religion. Therefore, the king of the Yogyakarta Palace has an obligation to maintain Islamic traditions, one of which is to continue the *Grebeg Mulud* ceremony tradition.

When the *Grebeg* ceremony tradition is viewed in the functional thinking stage, there are several fundamental reasons why this tradition continues to survive despite the strong influence of modernity. The first

fundamental reason is the fact that the *Grebeg* tradition has a significant impact on the economic sector of the Yogyakarta community. In reality, the *Grebeg* tradition contributes greatly to the local economy. Many people's incomes increase because of *Grebeg Mulud*. Based on this, when the night market, which is part of the *Grebeg Mulud* tradition, was discontinued, many people complained about the reduction in their income, as the number of visitors also decreased.

Another reason for the continued existence of this *Grebeg* tradition is its ability to attract tourists. Simply put, the *Grebeg* tradition has become a popular item on the tourist itinerary in Yogyakarta. Certainly, there is a clear correlation between the number of tourists attracted to a particular tourism destination and the subsequent increase in income for the local community. The significance of local traditions in enhancing tourism in a region cannot be overstated. (Wahono and Pramusinto 2020).

D. CONCLUSION

The *Grebeg Mulud* tradition is understood as a tradition in the Yogyakarta Palace to commemorate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad SAW. This tradition, in a religious context, occurs because the Yogyakarta Palace is an Islamic kingdom, thus obliged to uphold Islamic values. In addition, within a socio-symbolic framework, it is imperative for the king to embrace the *Grebeg* tradition due to his role as Sultan and Panatagama Khalifatullah. As a ruler and a guardian of the Islamic faith in society, this responsibility is paramount. Over time, the *Grebeg Mulud* tradition, originally interpreted as a celebration of the birth of Prophet Muhammad, is now understood by the public as merely an annual tourism agenda in the Yogyakarta Palace, transforming its original meaning as a model for spreading the Islamic religion into an agenda for tourism in Yogyakarta City.

The existence of the *Grebeg tradition*, within the framework of economic sociology, can be seen as a cultural attachment phenomenon. The economic actions of tourists are influenced by the *Grebeg tradition*, especially the night market activities. Both business owners and tourists as consumers are conditioned culturally through the night market activities. Thus, when the night market activities in the tradition are discontinued, there is a decrease in the number of tourists and a decrease in the income of business owners. Furthermore, the existence of the *Grebeg* tradition, from a cultural perspective, can be understood in three ways. First, in the context of mystical thinking, *Grebeg* is maintained because the community believes that the "pareden" distributed by the Sultan brings "blessings" and can improve their lives. Second, in the context of ontological thinking, the *Grebeg* tradition is maintained because the Yogyakarta Palace is an Islamic kingdom and must preserve Islamic traditions. Third, in a functional context, the tradition is maintained because socio-economically, *Grebeg* functions as a financially beneficial tradition that can attract tourists to visit Yogyakarta City.

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