



Seeking for Berkah: the Celebration of *Kiai Slamet*

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Abstract

One of many annual traditional Javanese ceremony for celebrating the new year is Kirab Kiai Slamet. This ceremony was held in Surakarta, Central Java by one of greatest Javanese Kingdom, Keraton Surakarta Hadiningrat. A thousand visitors who have come from all over of java just to see this ceremony bring various motives. This paper will elaborate how the perspective of Javanese people interprets their attendance on Kirab Kiai Slamet? One of their motives is *berkah*, then how they perceive this concept of 'ngalap *berkah*'? While *berkah* is one of the most prevalent religious practices in Indonesia, there are various meaning on it from a diverse group. In an effort to reveal the various interpretation of the concept of 'berkah', this paper offers an alternative perspective of the study of religion. Because the study of religion is more dominated by world religion paradigm that rigidly defines 'religion' as the structured form of religious tradition, an alternative perspective will be needed. After elaborating the experiment of Kirab Kiai Slamet and framed by some theories of religions, this paper will show how 'indigenous religion paradigm' have a positive contribution to the enriching of theories of religions in contemporary issues.

Keywords: *berkah* (blessing), Kiai Slamet, world religion paradigm, indigenous worldview.

1. Introduction: the worldview of Indigenous Religion on "Blessing"

The controversial theme was issued in the middle of Javanese New Year Celebration in Solo, one of the famous cultural city in Central Java, Indonesia. In this city, there are two Islamic Javanese Kingdom that has annual tradition celebration of Javanese new year. Not only held by Keraton, the celebration was held by Javanese society in their own village with various ways. What interesting is when 'Suro'¹ or 'Muharram' the first

month of the year has come, the contesting concept of 'ngalap berkah' becomes the symbol of religious identity and politically defining what religion is. Some people believe that Suro is the best time in seeking 'berkah' from various rituals, cleaning the space, and declaring the hope of year, but another group will campaign how the ritual of Suro become the reason of *syirik*². This paper tries to find out the element theories of religion in describing Kirab Kiai Slamet, as the virtue of Suro for Javanese in the middle of contestation between world religion paradigm and indigenous religion paradigm.

Solo, is one of famous tourist destination city in Central Java that provides traditional exotic Javanese culture. This city also has historical landscape consist of two Javanese kingdoms, *Keraton Surakarta* and *Keraton Mangkunegara*.³ Both keraton preserve Javanese culture in the middle of modernization and religious purification movement. Modernization has changed many things, including how the way people think about their lives, about their religion, and of the traditions of their ancestors. However, the city survives with their tradition that is still maintained by the kingdom. The modernization also opens the various religious understanding, mainly Islam. One of Islamic movement that spread in this city is *Majlis Tafsir Al Qur'an* (MTA)⁴. This group tries to purify Islam from other beliefs and traditions that considered as part of *syirik*. They began to criticize various ritual activities and beliefs of Javanese Culture. This campaign has shown clearly on the same night when the ritual *Kiai Slamet* was held at *Keraton Surakarta*. MTA through radio stations began to spread the understanding that the ritual was incompatible with Islam. Ritual is considered as an act of *shirk* (apostasy), 'worshipping' and 'praying' toward God's creation. In their website, mentioned⁵:

*"The belief that relates to ngalap berkah (getting blessing) of Kiai Slamet, Jamasan⁶, heirlooms, visiting sacred places is a belief that can exclude the actor from the religion of Islam (apostasy)."*⁷

Regardless of the theological debate of 'berkah', this contestation reveals the divergent of meaning and experiences of the religious phenomenon within Javanese people. The phenomena of 'ngalap berkah' has been studied by many scholars since the published book of Clifford Geertz "the Religion of Java" in 1960, that is a descriptive analysis of the main practices and forms, ideas and trends, religiously of the living in a middle-sized Javanese and its surrounding villages as observed in 1953 - 1954. He presented 'the general Javanese religious system' in the three variants, the *abangan* variant, the *santri* variant, and the *prijaji* variant. These

three main cultural types in Javanese society, defined by their religious beliefs, ethical preferences, and political ideologies. Wilfred Cantwell Smith explains how Geertz describes Abangan as *basic folk traditional of the island and its villages, of ancient origin, into whose evolution some Hindu and some Islamic element have been synthesized*⁸ The *abangan* tradition stresses animistic aspects of the syncretism and is mainly related to the peasant element in Java. The *santri* stresses Islamic aspects and is broadly related to the trading element, and the *prijaji* stresses Hinduist aspects and is related to the bureaucratic-aristocratic element.⁹ Based on these variants, contemporary scholars expand various issues of the relation between those variants. Even though, some of them criticize Geertz on his variants.

Whereas Geertz has tended to view only the minority *santri* variant in Java as Muslims in any normative senses, Woodward argues that Islam is both deep and enduring dimension of Javanese life.¹⁰ According to Woodward, rituals that have been held by Javanese, such as *slametan* and *ngalap berkah*, not only coming from an ancient origin religious tradition, or even the syncretic Hinduism, but these rituals have root in Islamic principles. He reveals that Islam has been spread through all Java via royal access which is more interested in Islamic mysticism for their cult and kingships. He wrote:

*“Islam has penetrated so quickly and so deeply into the fabric of Japanese culture because it was embraced by the royal courts as a basis for a theocratic state. Sufism (mystical Islam) forms the state cult and theory of kingship, which, as is true of the indigenized state of Bali and mainland Southeast Asia, is the primary model for popular religion. Religious discord is based not on the differential acceptance of Islam by Javanese of various social positions, but on the age-old Islamic question of how to balance the legalistic and mystical dimensions of the tradition (page 3-4)*¹¹

Both Geertz and Woodward, in this paper, will be so useful in describing the characters of participants of Kirab Kiai Slamet in contextualizing their diverse motive of attendance.

The other important issues of religious studies are the domination of world religion paradigm that influence how state, scholars, even people look at their religious experiences. That's why in this paper will start from the way of scholars defines religion. It will so influence how the modern society now differs religion and culture, and how they treat both of them differently¹². Religions have been identified by the scholars in the colonial era when they face various religious traditions that look like different from what they believe at that time. This process is called by reification, a box

and its boundaries that define religion. Smith explains that the scholars try to name 'reality' into a thing by organizing as a solid entity.¹³ The reification process was going globally, mainly for Christian. The definition of religion will be according to this religious paradigm that use to explain other religious traditions, not only by academics but also has been believed by the public.

Further explanation, scientists such as Catherine Bell, James Cox and Ronald Geaves, religious studies currently affected by what is called a '*world religion paradigm*'. This view will identify religious tradition by the essentialist meaning of 'religion'. Bell specifically pointed to Christianity as a prototype for other religions.¹⁴ The problem arises when governments use this view to identify religion and distinguish it from the culture. In fact, as Geaves¹⁵ told that would be very problematic when 'world religion paradigm' is used to analyze religion, as Geaves quoting from John Hull says, it will be "*an explores religion by focusing exclusively on discrete world faiths with rigid borders defined by separate origins, histories, beliefs and practices*". This essentialist paradigm has ignored the complexity and diversity of religious beliefs and practices of even the world religions.¹⁶ In this paper, will use the alternative worldview, as used by Samsul Maarif in his research,

"Hallowell explains world view as a perspective that "outlook upon the universe that is characteristic of a people." ... it is the picture the members of a society have the properties and characters upon their stage at the action. ... worldview refers to the way the world looks to that people looking out. ... it is the properties of existence as distinguished from and related to the self. It is, in short, a man's idea of the universe."

For this paper, I gathered data on Javanese world view in special rituals of Kirab Kiai Slamet. There are several "doors" to enter Javanese world view. So many materials can be researched to know how their worldview, it from their myths, legends, life stories, rituals, and so forth. However, I only use a ritual practice for a certain theme. The ritual is '*Kirab Kiai Slamet*' that is held as annual New Year Javanese Celebration. Seeking blessing '*berkah*', the one of reason, thousands of Javanese people come to Surakarta to attend this ritual. In this process, we can see how the Javanese relate their lives with Keraton (Kingdom- and all that relate to it), as the center of the cultural tradition of Javanese society. This research was conducted at the time *Kiai Slamet* was held in 2012. The informants in this research are the visitors of *Kiai Slamet* from different regions. I used their names with their permission; it will help me to code their opinions and motive about their attendance in *Kirab Kiai Slamet*.

In this writing prefer to use the term 'berkah' rather than to translate into 'blessing' in order to explain how important this term or Javanese culture. Even though this term linguistically comes from the Arabic word, *barokah* means blessing means an-name 'waz ziyadah' which grow and multiply or can be defined with a compound word *jalbul Khoir* or something that can bring good.¹⁷ In *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, *berkah* means "karunia Tuhan yang mendatangkan kebaikan bagi kehidupan manusia; berkat," the goodness that comes from God is set against something as it should so that what is acquired and held will always evolve and grow large beneficence. However, in some extent of spiritual experience, the phrase "ngalap berkah" has the pejorative meaning on apostasy issues. In other stories, there are many daily activities of religious belief cannot be separated from this values. That's why *ngalap berkah* is still alive in the Javanese consciousness and culture.

2. *Kiai Slamet*: Annual Celebration of Javanese New Year

The one of most popular of Javanese tradition for celebrating their new year is *Kirab Kiai Slamet*, in Surakarta, Central Java. *Kiai Slamet* the annual ceremony is held by Keraton Surakarta. The aim of ritual is for asking welfare and peace on the Java Island. However, the most interesting are Keraton Surakarta has a special buffalo that have an important role in leading the royal parade that brings historical heirlooms.

Kirab Kiai Slamet commemorates the first day of Suro¹⁸ and is held at midnight on the day¹⁹, but the parade will begin only depend on the 'willingness' of *Kebo Bule*. People will wait when they are going out from their cage. Based on various informants, they told that *Kebo Bule* often just coming out from their cage after 01:00 AM and this habit should be accepted by all people who involved in the procession.²⁰ *Kebo Bule* does not take order from anyone, they go to the courtyard palace by their will. Even, some people interpret the act of *Kiai Slamet* in the night of Suro will draw the future of their state. When *Kebo Bule* had been ready in the courtyard palace, the procession was ready to begin. This courtyard name is Kori Brajalana part of Kamandungan, the main gateway of the palace, hundreds or even thousands of people had gathered waiting for the parade. *Kebo Bule Kiai Slamet* led a procession and would be followed by the royal parade which consists of royal family and *abdi dalem*.

Kirab Kiai Slamet begins with the ceremonial of *jaman*, the ritual of cleansing and purifying the royal heirlooms, after which these will be taken out and carried around the Palace. The heirlooms are not always in the form of weapons (dagger, spear or sword), but also a musical instrument

(gamelan), as well as other tools (oil lamp, bowl and so on). The heirlooms should be cleaned, so the power (spirit) within them will bring the goodness and will not give negative impact to the owner (the royal family). All heirlooms have to be cleared in order to preserve them. Ceremonial washing heirlooms have a complex rite, including the pronouncement of prayers (mantras), giving offerings and burning incense, and providing sacred wash water (from a particular water source and mixed with flowers).

Before the ceremony held, the royal family, the courtiers, and nearby residents, as well as anyone who wants to participate Kirab Kiai Slamet, do prayer meals (*slametan*)²¹. *Slametan* was held in the palace courtyard. The royal family and courtiers dressed in Javanese traditional dress. The women were wearing black kebaya²² and *jarik*²³, while the men wore black *beskap*²⁴. There is some unique motive of *jarik* that will be used by the royal family. They are also identified by a certain pin on their dress. The courtiers of the lower class and their families do not have this pin as a sign, so they prefer to wear a (copied) paper royal logo image. The general public who wish to participate in *slametan* required to wear a yellow scarf which is usually owned by the royal family and *abdi dalem*, commonly, it is called *Samir*.

The royal family and their courtiers dressed all in black, with brown batik. The motive of *jarik* was plain black; the drawing of batik is like wings. They also wear a golden *samir*, the head hair bun for women and *blankon* for men. There are jasmine ornaments in the ears of the man. They also do not use footwear.

The first heirloom is a *tombak* (lance), covered by black fabric with full of jasmine. The heirlooms were accompanied by *sentir* (traditional lamp) lights carried by one of the courtiers. There is also a bright yellow umbrella and a tray of clay that is used to burn incense. The incense some was scattered like enliven magical historic objects. There are approximately ten heirlooms that brought by the royal parade. The next heritage shaped more or less the same as a spear, with a length of almost five meters. The spear was sheathed in black cloth and decorated with jasmine flowers. As with any form of spear vary. There are long, straight and slender, but may also have a large enough diameter at the ends. It can be seen by the number of courtiers who bring heritage interchangeably.

Route of the royal procession was headed north of the square, then the direction to *Gladag*. It starts from *Keraton* to *Alun-alun Utara* (North Square) and then *gladag*, turn left to *Pasar* (market) *Kliwon*, *Gading* (South Square), *Nonongan*, North square again and back to *Keraton*. However, this royal procession is always unique because the leader of the parade (*cucuk lampah*) is a royal buffalo (Kiai Slamet) that hard to be guessed where they

were going. That night, when the parade arrived at *Gladag*, *Kebo Bule* turn around and returned to the cage. The handler buffalo tried to persuade them to return to the carnival party but unfortunately they failed. Although the buffalo return to the palace, the procession continued to the fortress Vastenburg then went to *Pasar Kliwon*. Suddenly, the royal parade was stopped by *Kebo Bule*'s who had been persuaded to lead the procession. Then, they continue to the street Kaptén Mulyadi Kliwon, Veteran street, Yos Sudarso Street, *Nonongan*, Slamet Riyadi Street, Gladag and then returned to the palace. Kirab Kiai Slamet has walked along 4,4 kilometers and spent about 3.5 hours. The last heirlooms entered the palace through Kori Sri Manganti around 04.00 am.

3. What People Said about *Kiai Slamet*?

The history of Kiai Slamet is not clear enough even from the royal stories. The story of *Kiai Slamet* is like folklores in the certain society.

The story about where *Kebo Bule*'s origin is unclear and very diverse. Some of the participants, Sulasmi (36), Tijah dan Ngatiyem believe that *Kebo Bule* is the powerful buffaloes which save the burning house in the time of Sultan Agung who named them as *Kiai Slamet*. They were only owned by the Keraton Surakarta because the kingdom believed that *Kiai Slamet* will provide 'safety' of the palace and the people of Solo. The other participant, Pak Martinus Yusuf (51) told the real *Kiai Slamet* was dead since a long time ago, while now is only the descendent of *Kiai Slamet*, the existence of *Kebo Bule* is since the palace was established.

Another story, one of the participant, Pak Bari told about the relation between Keraton Surakarta's history and Kiai Slamet. Formerly, there was the Pajang Kingdom in what called now as Central Java. Pajang was divided into two kingdoms, Surakarta and Yogyakarta. In Surakarta kingdom, there was a powerful figure called *Kiai Slamet*. After his death, he was transformed into a buffalo. Then there is a ritual to parade *Kiai Slamet*'s descendants around the city (Solo) to clean the city from peril, catastrophe and then be secure. Even though, he has no attention to getting the dung, no certain goals except want to watch Kirab Kiai Slamet. For the same reason, Bu Sri, another participant said that the *Kirab* is only a tradition that should be preserved. She was interested in watching the *Kirab* because it is entertaining and only once a year, and she did not have the attention of ngalap berkah of Kiai Slamet as other participants.

Another story told that *Kebo Bule* is the gift of the Regent of Ponorogo to Pakubuwono II. Sukiman (32) believed that there is a special budget from Indonesian Government for performing the royal parade. He

also remained that *Kebo Bule* is only common buffaloes, nothing special. It is special because of favored by people, so the palace is not blessed simply because of a lot of people who come to watch the procession.

The other group of participants is Hartono (33), Sukiman, Fuad, Pak Surtojo (60) Bu Laras (57), Ibu Salbiyah (Surakarta) and Ibu Tina. They told that not all people believe on its *berkah Kebo Bule* or *Kiai Slamet*, the beginning of *Kirab* is not only deciding by *Kebo Bule*, some say depend on the fancy of the palace. Pak Surtojo and Bu Laras added that the buffalo's dung is usually made for amulets, for example, people who want their merchandise sold. The dung will be wrapped in paper and placed in the cart. For both of them, that was just a suggestion.

Pak Wandu, Pak Sayuti, Ibu Tamimi, Ibu Surtinah, Ibu Salbiyah have other version of the story of *Kiai Slamet*, that the Surakarta kingdom had *abdi dalem* named Slamet, but the King condemned him to be a buffalo, "people stupid is like buffalo " and then "the man turned into what became known as the *Kebo Bule* of *Kiai Slamet*". About *Kiai Slamet* name, Fuad (30), Mbah Gino, and Mbah Tarto (80), Ibu Widodo explain the same way, the buffalo called by '*Kebo Bule*' because of its skin as white as Bule²⁵ (Caucasians), there is a sort of white with a somewhat reddish color. *Kebo Bule* decided when the procession begins, sometimes at 00.00, but sometimes passing from it. The other informant added that *Kebo Bule* as the guard of the sacred lance which showed in ceremony of *Kirab Keraton*. *Kebo Bule* will appear in front of people based on their desirabilities, so the ceremony has not clear schedule. Actually, this ceremony is not only about *Kebo Bule* but also more about *Keraton's* heirloom things.

The various stories of *Kiai Slamet* are shown that most of the people do not really understand the origin of *Kiai Slamet*, but they believe in them. Even, the other people attend the *Kirab Kiai Slamet* only as tourist, interesting in the hustle, royal traditional performance, and other reasons. How differs motive of participants from different social classes and many places unite them into the one ritual gathered of the year. This brings that the existence of *Kiai Slamet* is important as the symbol of the relation between people, nature and their state of life.

4. Why is *Kiai Slamet* so important?

Each Javanese community has a different belief of the procession, including the aim to get *berkah* for a simple way to work, livelihood even mate. *Abdi dalem* emphasize that *Kebo Bule* was considered *Kiai Slamet as sacred animals* and obviously they should be cared (*ruwat*), so people should not make them angry, even kill them. They should care them until time to

die. If *Kebo Bule* died of old (*Kebo Bule's body* forbidden to be eaten) is like humans, they should be buried. Sultan held such a doctrine or ritual to commemorate the death *Kebo Bule*, their breeds were maintained. Typically, if other (ordinary) buffaloes join *Kiai Slamet* group in the same cage, they will not feel comfortable. That's why *Kebo Bule* have special cages in southern palace square.

For *abdi dalem*, the behaviors of *Kiai Slamet* will portrait the state of Surakarta. The royal parade becomes a symbol of hope "*Wilujeng*" for Surakarta to be a better place for people. An informant also told that for the Java community, *Kirab Kiai Slamet* is kind of ritual for *eling*, remembering *Gusti Allah* (God).

That message is also explained by Sulowo (56), the essence of night 1st Sura is the time for the Javanese to *meneng* (silence), reflect, and contemplate life. The *Kebo Bule* is a *pepiling* (reminder) that people should not follow their passions like animals. Ritual is not intended to worshiping animal. It is just a warning to people to be wiser. Therefore, the way to commemorate *Suro* night should be *menget*, *meneng*, or silence that means for self-introspection. Nevertheless, one week before *Kirab Kiai Slamet*, Government and citizen organized the special art events called by *Suro Loka* or *Pesona Suro*. These performances invited many dance groups featuring such *Arjuno Wiwoho* and *Sasonomulyo*. Sulowo added that "*This ritual is intended to express gratitude to God for all the livelihood of the year, and hope to get blessings for the New Year. Culture cannot be equated with religion. Should not be mixed up. Respect the culture.*" This perspective is common within society in differentiating between religion and culture. People will be worried about mixing religion and culture because, in some extent, it will be concluded as blasphemy. However, people try to preserve culture as part of their identity as Javanese, and for other people, try to purify their religion from certain culture. *Kebo Bule* is the part of this culture symbol that living within Javanese. Even so, the palace opens this *Kirab* by reciting Quran and believe that this is also part of their spirituality conduct.

Interesting story from the informant, that *Kirab Kiai Slamet* is not to try to mix the cultures and religions in the one event, what they are doing is cultural preservation and differs from the religious affair. In the context of Indonesia, religion is defined by the state, that's why culture is understood as a something different but still deserves to be preserved, in addition, also the object of cultural tourism. In fact, the worldview of Javanese people perceives *Kirab Kiai Slamet* as a spiritual experience that that will influence their next daily activities even their future days.

5. Palace and Axis Mundi

Keraton Surakarta Sultanate built during the reign of the Majesty Sri Pakubuwono II²⁶, precisely in the year 1744. At that time, the construction of Keraton Surakarta Sultanate Palace Kartasura intended as a substitute for severely damaged due to events that occurred *Geger Pacinan* previous year in 1743.

The building of the Palace follow the pattern of the old palace architecture and layout, it is located lengthwise from north to south, *Kori Kamandungan*²⁷ and *Prabasuyasa*²⁸ followed by *Kartasura*, *Alun-alun* (square), and *Wismaya Manguntur Penangkila*. The layout of palace follows *Negarakertagama*. In addition, people said that the composition of the building in the palace is complex layout which the composition is similar to Dewa Indra's palace in *Kaindran Jonggring Bathara Saloka*, where the main building (*Prabasuyasa*) facing south, *pendapa* (*Sasana Sewaka*) facing east and *Siti Hinggil* and *Pengelaran* (*Sasana Sumewa*) facing north.

The Javanese palace is named by Keraton or usually called *kedaton* (the datu). At the entrance of the square (named by *Gladag*), there are two giant statues, made in the year 1860 and 1930. The entrance of the square is divided in two: *Gladag* in in the north side and *Pamurakan* in the south, which stand on either side of the majestic archway built in 1860 Saka or 1930 AD, coinciding with the 64th anniversary of Paku Buwana X (Thursday 21 Rejeb Alip 1859 or January 3, 1929). Kraton Surakarta Hardiningrat has the great wall, about three to five feet, with a thickness of one meter. They called it as *Baluwarti*. The gate with a curved semi-circular shaped square in the center circle reminds the shape of *Supit Urang*. Such architecture is an ancient form of defense is deliberately constructed to protect the palace from the threat of danger. Then, the gate that passed to get to the center of Kirab Kiai Slamet is *Kamandungan Lor*. Main entrance gate of the Kiai Slamet is north into the courtyard *Kamandungan* called *Kori Brajanala*. This gate was built by Susuhan Pakubowono III which used *Semar Tinandu* style.

People always come to *Keraton Surakarta*, such us Pak Alim and Pak seno, Pak Windu, Ngatni (48), Mas Kris, Mas Larto and thousands of others in routines palace ceremony/rituals that have held. Those traditions are *Sekaten*, *Gamelan*, and *Grebeg Januran Suro*. Pak Alim was sure that the tradition was abolished when Keraton collapses. Though, he also said that the rituals help the economy of traders because of the large of people who came to the palace. Pak Windu added that the traders were delighted when *Kebo Bule* touched their goods because it means that their merchandise will be sold. They also warn the visitors not to wear red clothes and turn on the

flash when taking pictures (most of the informant reminding of it). *Kebo Bule* according to them is a special animal owned by a person who has power named *Kiai Slamet*.

As a symbol of culture and identity, the palace and *Kiai Slamet* become the center of a tradition for Javanese, especially in Central Java. Within keraton, there are many symbols and rituals that contain spiritual learning, ways of life, identity, and Javanese philosophy of life. In Eliade's theory of *axis mundi* portrays the cosmos in the living tradition including palace physically and all preserving rituals.

For Eliade, something becomes 'sacred' because 'sacred reflection' which is named by hierophany. Eliade told about hierophany as "*all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality. The cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany*". As a manifestation of sacred and contributes for "sacred". Eliade made the term of *Axis Mundi*, the center of the world, that will be not personally because of for symbolizing "the Center" so it is sure as a place. This center also connected the sacred and the profane in the world, thus, people try to stay as close as possible of *Axis Mundi*. This place is the center of the beginning of the sacred. The *Axis Mundi* can be found in the various great religious traditions such as Palestine for Hebrew tradition, Ka'ba for Islamic tradition, Golgotha for Christians and others .

After defining *Axis Mundi*, Eliade also used the term of *Imago Mundi*. This term is explained something that will perform the sacred, only if it have relation with *Axis Mundi*. The other important thing for Eliade on these variables is holy time. For him, the time is not linear but circular, when everything will always go back to the beginning. That's why religious tradition celebrates the New Year with certain rituals in an attempt to re-purification.

The palace is an *Axis Mundi* or the place where the sacred has been manifested in hierophany. For Javanese, the palace was the earth's core that becomes the facility to connect between the sacred and the profane. *Kiai Slamet* is *Imago Mundi*, something that got a manifestation of the sacred. But it is not the sacred because *Kiai Slamet* only would be the sacred if it is in *Axis Mundi* area, or in this case is the palace (the sacred). In this relation between *axis mundi* and *imago mundi*, the concept of *ngalap berkah* has diverse meaning in Javanese perspective. It will also portrait the mingled between religion and culture in the sense of Javanese tradition.

6. *Ngalap Berkah* (Seek for Blessing)

The participants who attended Kirab *Kiai Slamet* have different purposes, in accordance with their own interests. It also depends on how

they interpret the *Kiai Slamet* tradition based on their personal thoughts, is it only about recreational culture or beliefs as a part of their identity as Javanese.

The informants mentioned believe that *Kebo Bule's* dung is considered capable of giving fertility in farm fields. Including Mbah Darso Utomo (70), he believed that *Kiai Slamet's* dung had been helped to fertilize his soil, so fields that he has always maintained become a good harvest, free from pest, and provide benefits to endless utilized. Thus, he felt it would be very disappointed if he cannot come personally to participate in this annual ritual. He comes twice a year to Keraton Solo to follow rituals *Kiai Slamet* and *Mauludan* or often referred to *Sekaten*²⁹. The interesting of this person is his practices, Mbah Darso Utomo, spent most of his life with the spiritual of Javanese beliefs. He admitted that by attending *Kirab Kyai Slamet*, he will get some blessings. He brought a plastic bag which contains dung, flower, and *janur*. He added:

*"Saya bersyukur sawah saya subur dan selalu memberikan penghidupan yang baik. Para tetangga suka bertanya-tanya tentang sawah saya yang terhindar dari serangan wereng. Maklum, tanaman padi memang paling rentan terhadap serangan hama, seperti wereng, tikus dan burung"*³⁰

Further, He conducts Javanese rituals in every certain time of Javanese calendars. He does fasting in the three days on the midnight of the month, no eating meats, chicken, fish, only eat vegetables, rice or cassava. This ritual is called as *ngrowot*. He explains what his understanding about these rituals of Javanese spiritualism: *Ilmu Jawa itu ya ilmu titen mbak, tidak bisa dilogika, dipikir, hanya bisa diyakini. Membaca pertanda yang diberikan kepada alam, dan kita belajar untuk mengenalnya.*³¹ In his perspective, how to see his destiny to follow the sign of nature shows the relation between culture and nature as the personal relationship.

Many types of research have been conducted in portraying various Javanese rituals in seeking to bless (*ngalap berkah*). Unfortunately, they only show its aims for getting better people a livelihood, but that do not give the divers interpretation and perspective in using this term for different groups of Javanese people. The meaning of *berkah* of *santri* in honoring their *kiai*³² is different with the meaning of *berkah* of Javanese people in honoring their ancestors/nature. Most of the stories define '*berkah*' as the gift that people seek for gaining what they're desired. In a religious sense, '*berkah*' is about blessing from God to people for their obedience to Him. The controversial issue is when '*berkah*' is only the prerogative gift of God for the puritan religious group, so seeking blessing '*berkah*' object rather than God is part

of damaging religious faith. However, *berkah* is not only in the one way of interpretations. Javanese has unique point of view on this concept in preserving their cultural and religious relation for their daily life. Theory of religion maybe can explain various relations of Javanese toward Kiai Slamet in conceptualizing the meaning of 'ngalap *berkah*'.

The oldest and rudimentary theory is a theory developed by Taylor, known as animism. It explains the concept of a soul that gets a personal attribute, although generally, Taylor defines his theory as a belief in a spiritual thing. Animism is the process of animating that means inanimate object turns came to living things. The construction of this theory is based on the experience of the dream that felt by the primitive people. They believe the image in his mind is as important as when they are awake, it is called the self-duality. Each object has a section known as the body hard in tangible form, but also has a soft body, and affects the lives of the living things, which is called the soul. The process of animating is extended not only to humans but also phenomena including animals, plants, and nature. Therefore objects have souls and they have the ability to affect the world.

In the tradition of *Kiai Slamet*, people turn *Kebo Bule* as something that has the ability to affect their lives. It was understood by certain facts perceived by some people, believed from *Kebo Bule*'s blessing (*berkah*). Therefore, 'belief' becomes an important element. The belief comes from some important rules when they are treating to attached *Kebo Bule*. Such as, *Kebo Bule* should be treated as respected human; the most concrete thing is a ritual that chooses *Kebo Bule* as guides the group that brought the royal heirlooms. It shows the incredibility of *Kebo Bule*. In fact, the *abdi dalem* also give special offerings and rituals in order to pleased *Kebo Bule* perform their duties well. Another element is a spirit that has the power. Based on the origin of *Kebo Bule*, several speakers explained that *Kebo Bule* actually is a man who turned out to be the buffalo (by condemned the king or others). There are stories that *Kebo Bule* is a special weapon owned by the powerful *abdi dalem*, named by *Kiai Slamet*. Although there are many different versions explaining *Kebo Bule*, but all can be concluded that *Kebo Bule* has as special spirit, the soul. This soul is believed by human beings, have the power to protect, to influence, and even give good luck to them.

Turn to other theory sociology, Max Weber is the most famous scholar of this studies. One of his theory of religion is the concept of "calling"³³. Using this perspective of theory would explain why thousands of people come to Kirab *Kiai Slamet*, despite having to wait all night just to see *Kebo Bule* through. People were fighting over of *Kebo Bule*'s dung. They believe that the dung was a blessing that will bring them the prosperity.

Such action would not be done without them felt called to do so. The people who earn part of *Kebo Bule*, such as dung, hair, food leftovers, and drinking water, to feel that they are chosen to be prosperous. They are motivated to earn *berkah* (blessings) from a part of the *Kiai Slamet* which they get. For the farmers, they will spread *Kiai Slamet's* dung in their fields. They believe, it will be fertile their fields and grow better than the other fields. As well as for traders, they will save *Kiai Slamet's* dung or *janur* that has been bypassed by *Kiai Slamet*, as a blessing, in order to their wares would be sold. When God calls someone, people have to answer. Based on the Weber's theory, 'wealth' is a sign that someone has answered the call of god. Likewise, with *Kiai Slamet* calling people to get his blessings, and then get *Kiai Slamet's* dung, it is a sign that people are fulfilling his calling. Therefore, thousands of people scrambling to get things relating to *Kiai Slamet*.

Now, we came to modern theory of religion, specifically about the worldview of indigenous religion (to differ with world religion paradigm), the story from Sayuti (one of *Kiai Slamet* participant), he got *Kiai Slamet* fur as fetish and put it in a small white cloth and then took it wherever he goes, especially when carrying out his profession as a driver. At one time he had a terrible accident, his car was hit and badly damaged, but he was not paint at all, no injured, and according to this remarkable event is the gift of God Almighty through the fur which he carries.

Bapak Mulyono dan Mpok Endang, for them, it has become imperative to attend this event. They told that because they had twice missed *Kirab Kiai Slamet*, as the impact is one of their family becomes a crazy man, so since then they always found time to attend the procession *Kirab Kiai Slamet*. "*I get flowers and water, and then I use it to our home because it would bring good luck and blessings.*"

The story above also explains that in order to be successful in life, an individual needs to establish relationships with non-human beings. For them, nature is not different with human beings, as a 'person'. Learning from their experiences, they understand that non-human beings such as buffalo, *janur*, its dung, and so forth directly contribute to their successes as well as their failure.

The theory of "personhood," the way Javanese understand it, is explained by some scholar, such as Hallowel, De Castro, Bird David, and Morrisa.³⁴ In the beginning, Irvin Hallowell explained about the paradigm of interpersonal relation in his studying about the cosmology the Ojibwa of North America. Hallowell detects that the term 'kinship' of Ojibwa people, grandfather, referring to human beings and non-human as well as animals,

thunder, lightning, stones, and others.³⁵ Those are perceived as a 'person', but all of the non-human beings are a person, but some of them. It is like how the informant told about the origin of *Kebo Bule* who is *abdi dalem* who named as *Kiai Slamet*. Not all buffaloes are perceived as 'person', but only *Kiai Slamet* is.

This theory of animism by Taylor was 'upgraded' by modern anthropology scholar, Nurit Bird-David.³⁶ He developed the new concept of animism. According to him, animism better understood as a relational epistemology rather than a theological concept. As what he find in his studying on the Nayaka People in India, elaborate that Nayaka people's perception of human beings and other beings such as land, trees, animals and others are equally social actors. The idea 'person' is the awareness of the interrelationship between human beings and other beings.³⁷ Then, Viveiros de Castro (1998) proposes the theory of "*perspectivism*" argues that to perceive animals or non-human beings as persons are to attribute to animals the capacity of conscious intentionality and agency which define the position of the subject.³⁸

Based on those theories, it will be shown that the worldview of indigenous religion is equally shared of relations. The human and nature have equal relation or called as 'intersubjective relation'. The paradigm is based on a worldview that the introduction of the self (human) is a form that is not by itself, but dependent and related to another form.

In the perspective of world religion paradigm, the concept of 'person' always is misunderstood as 'worshipping'. The relation that made by 'world religion paradigm' is hierarchy relation, that consist of supernatural (God, Spirit, Deities), culture (human) and nature (animals, wood, stone, sea). 'Supernatural' always is in the highest position, 'culture' under the 'supernatural', but higher and more powerful than 'nature'. This hierarchy position also determines the character of relations that occur between parts of the world. Relationships of 'culture' (human) and 'supernatural' (God), always with the characters 'worship', while relations 'culture' and 'nature' are more likely characterized 'exploitative', where nature is understood as the fulfillment of human needs and the user will be the power of God.³⁹ Using this perspective, some religious institution argues that what called as '*ngalap berkah*' for non-human being is apostasy, as they understand it become 'worship' relation.

In this relation of intersubjective relation, Samsul Maarif added that:

"Duties and rights are defined through relationship. Relationship through encounters determines kinds of duties and rights. Different relationship specifies different duties and rights. A person knows his/her duties, and also

rights when s/he is engaged in a relationship with another person. Without relationship, no personhood is recognized. Recognition of personhood, in turn, necessitates an engagement in the relationship.”

‘*Ngalap berkah*’ is the concept of the relationship between subjects. ‘*Ngalap berkah*’ is one experience, part of the recognizing of themselves with ‘the other’ that continue since the early experiences. The knowledge was found, inherited and transmitted also through experiences. As *Kirab Kiai Slamet* still be maintained as a heritage of belief that also provide an ‘experience’ and ‘knowledge’ surrounding communities, which contribute to the ritual that was ongoing. It was rated as a commitment between ‘self’ and ‘the other’. Based on that, the perception of ‘the self’ and their interaction with ‘the other’ are formed through a variety of experiences both ritualistic and everyday life.

7. Conclusion

Even *Ngalap berkah* is one of the most prevalent religious practices that can easily found in some activities of Javanese, but it contains the negative perception in relation with non-human ritual. In Islamic tradition, *berkah* is about the way people should do anything based on religious values that will bring God’s blessing. The controversy of *ngalap berkah* comes because of negating the various meanings of it. In the world religion paradigm, the blessing only can be given by God (the concept of Supreme Being), while some religious tradition took ‘*berkah*’ can also be given by ‘nature’. This intersubjective relation built the relation of ‘person’ that not only understand as ‘human’ as culture part of the world but also the relation between culture ‘human’ and nature. *Keraton*, as *Axis Mundi*, the center of the world, connected vertical world (the sacred) and horizontal world (the profane), a place where the sacred has been manifested in *hierophany*. *Kiai Slamet* as *Imago Mundi* becomes the manifestation of the ‘sacred’. The experience of the meeting of this ‘sacred’ grows and evoke ‘the knowledge’ and ‘commitment’ between culture (human) and nature.

Endnotes:

¹ *Siji Suro* is the first day of the Javanese calendar year in the month of Sura (also transcribed as "Suro"), corresponding with the Islamic month of Muharram. The current system of Javanese calendar was inaugurated by Sultan Agung of Mataram in 1633. He issued a decree declaring a change to the lunar calendar system, without referring to the year of the Islamic calendar (at the time 1035 Hجريyah). While the number in the Saka calendar system continued to accrue, it became the year 1547 Jawa instead. The Javanese calendar system was instituted across all of Java Island, except for Banten, Batavia and Banyuwangi. For celebrating this day, Javanese held various rituals, such as cleaning historical heirlooms, cleaning of space by traditional ritual gathering, and others.

² The concept of *syirik* is Islamic concept that explains the sin of practicing idolatry or polytheism, the deification or worship of anyone or anything other than Allah, the establishment of "partners" placed beside God. It is the vice that is opposed to the virtue of *Tawhid* (monotheism).

³ Keraton Mangkunegaran that is placed in Ronggowarsito Street, Surakarta, held the ritual washing Mangkunegaran palace heirlooms or named by *jamasan* was chaired by *Kanjeng Gusti Pangeran Adipati Arya Mangkunegara IX*. This year, six heritage palace belonging Mangkunegaran were paraded. Thousands of people were competing for 'water' of *jamasan* in the palace treasures Mangkunegaran Solo on Thursday (11/14/2012) evening while celebrating 1 Suro.

⁴ An educational institution and propaganda Islamiyah based in Surakarta. MTA established by Alm. Ust. Abdullah Thufail Saputra in Surakarta on 19 September 1972 with the goal to bring the Muslims back to the Qur'an.

⁵ Ayyub Al Fath, *Bahaya Syirik Tradisi Malam 1 Muharram 15 Muharram 1437 - 29 Oktober 2015*, <http://www.mta.or.id/2015/10/29/bahaya-syirik-tradisi-malam-1-muharram/>

⁶ One way of caring for heirlooms, historical objects, ancient objects, including objects that are considered to have good luck. In Javanese tradition, *jamasan* heritage into something quite sacred spiritual activity and is performed only during certain times. Normally *jamasan* heirloom done only once in a year ie in the month of Suro. Therefore *jamasan* heritage has meaning and noble purpose, these activities included in the activities of cultural rituals considered sacred.

⁷ The original words: "*Keyakinan yang berkaitan dengan ngalap berkah dari Kiai Slamet, Jamasan, pusaka-pusaka, mendatangi tempat-tempat keramat, adalah merupakan keyakinan yang dapat mengeluarkan pelakunya dari agama Islam.*"

⁸ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Reviewed Work: *The Religion of Java* by Clifford Geertz, *Economic Development and Cultural Change* Vol. 11, No. 2, Part 1 (Jan., 1963), pp. 203-206

⁹ Viktor T. King *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 129 (1973), no: 4, Leiden, 457-481

¹⁰ Frederick Mathewson Denny, Reviewed Work: *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* by Mark R. Woodward, *History of Religions* Vol. 32, No. 1 (Aug., 1992), pp. 79-81

¹¹ Mark R. Woodward *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989).

¹² The anthropologists construct or 'create' an identity of Bali Aga community. They were naming them to differ 'pure Hindus' or 'non-Javanese Hindus'. It is academic construct that make simple categorization and have many influences. The name of "Bali Aga" appear because the growing of interaction between Islam and Hinduism-Balinese that

conceal the dichotomization, Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, "Bali aga" and Islam: Ethnicity, Ritual Practice, and "Old-balinese" as an Anthropological Construct, Indonesia, 77 (April (2004): 27 - 55

¹³ For this process will start by labeling of the subject. In labeling, they prefer some unique characters or even 'what' differ with they called as 'religion'. If the subject is not fulfilling the 'requirements' of being religion, so it would be defined as 'culture'. The religion also needs the second process, 'institutionalization', the system and structure that will rule religious community. The third process is formalization, this process need governmental recognition for legalizing the existence of certain 'religion'.

¹⁴ Bell, Catherine, Paradigms behind (And before) the Modern Concept of Religion. History and Theory, 45(4) (2004), 27-46.

¹⁵ Geaves, R. The dangers of essentialism: South Asian communities in Britain and the "world religions" approach to the study of religions. Contemporary South Asia, 14(1) (2005), 75-90. p. 76.

¹⁶ Samsul Maarif, Indigenous Religion of Ammatoa of Sulawesi, Indonesia: Ethical Ways of Relationship among Persons of Different Beings, *Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS), Graduate School Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia*

¹⁷ al-Qamus al-Muhith by al-Fairuz Abadi 3/293, Lisanul 'Arab by Ibnul Manzhur 10/395.

¹⁸ The Javanese have a calendar established by Sultan Agung. In this calendar, there are the days of two cycles: the weekly cycle of seven days and pancawara week cycle consisting of 5 dino pasaran (Legi, Pahing, Pon, Wage, Kliwon). In the year 1625 AD, Sultan Agung declared to change the Saka calendar. Calendar Javanese Mataram version was using qamariah system or lunar calendar, but it do not use numbers of Hijri (at that time was 1035 H). The year of Saka retained and passed on. This is done for the sake of the principle of sustainability. Until now, Javanese celebrated their new year at first Hijrhi, or they called by Suro. In various places on Java, there are several ways for celebrating the New Year based on each local culture. In Kediri, East Java, people poured coins to be stored and the means to get blessing, they also mutually made dawet war, a kind of Javanese sweet drink, as a celebration. The most interesting New Year celebration is the Heirloom parade on Javanese Kingdom.

¹⁹ The Javanese day starts at the sunset of the previous day, not at midnight - as a consequence considerable emphasis is made in the 'eve' of the first Day of the month of Sura.

²⁰ The parade at Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta was delayed for an hour since all nine water buffalos declined the walk in front of the Keraton. After various attempts at persuasion, the water buffalos eventually began their walk and, as usual, many Solo residents and visitors waited to cheer them on.

²¹ Clifford Geertz famously identified the slametan prayer meal as the 'core ritual' of Javanese culture. He described it as an animistic rite the purpose of which is to reinforce social solidarity; he also regarded it as a largely village or folk-Islamic phenomenon. Woodward agrees with Geertz on his first proposition, that the slametan is a core Javanese ritual, but argues that it is neither an animistic rite nor restricted sociologically to the village sphere. He offers an alternative definition of the slametan as 'a ritual meal at which Arabic prayers are recited and food is offered to the Prophet, saints, and ancestors, who are implored to shower blessings on the community'.

²² An Indonesia traditional dress for women, a tight fitting blouse that enhances the torso of the woman; the fold-back collarless neck and front opening; long sleeves; and the type of semi-transparent fabric. Women of higher social status would have help in wrapping their torso with the stagen however women who were not so fortunate to have help could dress themselves by tying the end of the stagen to a post and literally wrapping themselves into it.

²³ Jarik is traditional fabric and more popular as *batik*. Clothing kebaya worn by women among the nobility and the common people well as everyday clothing and ceremonial clothing. At the ceremonial clothes as worn by a royal woman for example, using a pin joint clothing kebaya combined with fabric or jarik, the head hair bun (bun), and is equipped with a wear jewelry such as earrings, rings, necklaces and bracelets as well as fan usually does not miss.

²⁴ Javanese traditional clothing worn usually by men for formal traditional attire.

²⁵ Bule is slang word that is commonly used in Indonesia for "whites" or the descendants of the original European / white. The term is used to also be used to describe the light - colored skin.

²⁶ Keraton (Palace) Surakarta is one of the buildings of the exotic in his day. One architect of this palace is Mangkubumi Prince (later the title of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I) which is also the main architect of Sultan Palace. It is therefore not surprising that the basic pattern of spatial two palaces (the Yogyakarta and Surakarta) have many common similarities. Keraton Surakarta as can be witnessed today was not built simultaneously in 1744-45, but was built in stages by maintaining basic spatial patterns that remain the same as initially. Development and large-scale restoration carried out by His Majesty last Pakubuwono X (Sunan PB X) that reigned from 1893 to 1939. Much of this palace shades of white and blue with a mixture of Javanese-Europe architecture.

²⁷ To enter the complex from the north must pass through this gate (Kori Kemandungan). Kori Kamandungan is the entrance to the palace, this building style like a butterfly which their blue wings united in one highest spot. it can be seen from the courtyard in front Roto Lor with Bale and Stage Support the Buwana towering in the background.

²⁸ Dalem Ageng Sasana Parasdya Prabasuyasa is the core and most important buildings from around the Palace of Surakarta. This is where buried heirlooms and also the throne of the king who became a symbol of empire. At this location is also a king swore when it began to reign before the coronation ceremony in front of an audience in Sitihinggil north.

²⁹ This is the celebration of the birthday of The prophet Muhammad. The palace will open the night carnival and *pasar rakyat* for 10 days.

³⁰ I'll spread it on the fields, I am grateful to my field fertile and always provide a good livelihood. The neighbors like to wonder about my field that is spared from attack leafhoppers. Understandably, the rice plant is most susceptible to pests such as leafhoppers, rodents and birds.

³¹ "The source of knowledge in Javanese perspective is by observation, it cannot be logical, can not to be thought, it only can be believed. Read the sign that was given by nature, and we learn to know what will they said to us."

³² Baskoro Adi Nugroho, *Hubungan Sang Kyai dengan Santri Mukim dan Santri Kalong di Pondok Pesantren Al Muthi'in Maguwi Bangutapan Bantul Yogyakarta*, Skripsi, Program Studi Sosiologi Agama Fakultas Ushuluddin, Studi Agama, dan Pemikiran Islam

Universitas Islam Negeri Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2010. More explanation can be read on Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiai dan Visinya mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2011),

³³ Weber theory known as the concept of calling, which is took away from the term Protestant ethics. In the context of religion has an important role in the formation of capitalism in Europe. Through the doctrine of destinations, Protestant ethics asserts that to be a chosen people, man must fulfill the calling of God. The calling is a belief to be prosperous. Therefore, if one is prosperous, that means God chose him. This radical change is a reaction to traditional hierarchy of relationship which suggests that a pastor has the right to pray. Thus, the concept of calling shows that every people can pray for himself. At the time it was calling the concept of work, they are trying to be more prosperous, making more capital, a rational economic system to earn more profit. Therefore, religion has become independent variable change society, is no longer a symbol of alienation or opium.

³⁴ Samsul Maarif, *Indigenous Religion of Ammatoa of Sulawesi, Indonesia: Ethical Ways of Relationship among Persons of Different Beings*, Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS), Graduate School Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia

³⁵ Hallowell, Alfi-ed Irving (1 96011 975). Ojibka ontology, behavior, and world view. In D. p. 189

³⁶ Bird-David, Nurit, Viveiros de Castro, E., Hornborg, A., Ingold, T., Morris, B., Palsson, G., et al. Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology. Commentaries. Author's reply. *Current Anthropology*, (1999). 40,67-91.

³⁷ Samsul Maarif, *Indigenous Religion of Ammatoa of Sulawesi, Indonesia: Ethical Ways of Relationship among Persons of Different Beings*, Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS), Graduate School Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia

³⁸ Viveiros de Castro, E. Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, (1998). 4(3), 469-488.

³⁹ Samsul Maarif, *Kajian Kritis Agama Lokal*, Program Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya, (Yogyakarta, 2015, p 21- 38)

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