Slametan in Javanese House Construction

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**ABSTRACT**

Today, instant products support property business to be popular even though it may eliminate local wisdom. Meanwhile, traditional Javanese people build houses in complex ways by appreciating steps of its constructions. The appreciation is called _slametan_ to make symbolic accordance and interactions between human beings, _Gusti_ or God, and nature. _Slametan_ usually is completed with _ubo rampe_ that consists of ceremonial foods and utensils. The ceremony will be followed with praying and eating together which symbolize vertical and horizontal relationships. _Slametan_ in Javanese house construction contains three steps; groundbreaking ceremony to indicate beginning of construction, top roof installment or _munggah moloh_ for protection of people inside, and first settlement of the house to bless people who will live inside. Those steps symbolize cosmological, contextual, mythical, cultural, and social aspects in harmonic life of Javanese people. Cosmological aspect states that people should consider wholeness of surrounding world beside their own selves. In contextual aspect, house construction is special event that should be appreciated and celebrated among nature and human beings. Mythical aspect indicates belief to conform to element of nature both internal bodies and minds and external natural surroundings. Cultural aspect shows _slametan_ as a habitual event to appreciate, thank, and live together with nature without destroying it. Social aspect examines openness to others in order to avoid egoism. In conclusion, _slametan_ in house construction is based on Javanese people's cosmological belief of nature. This activity is done to conform people to others; human beings, _Gusti_ as entity beyond them, and nature.

**KEYWORDS**: cosmology, house construction, Javanese culture, _slametan_
to house issues related to properties business. As long as a building is a house, whether apartment, flat, or boarding house is enough for people without knowing how it is built. People start to ignore meaning of home in the house in their instant thought.

Today, instant products support property business to be popular even though it may eliminate local wisdom. People just buy houses in modern cities but traditional people build it primitively. Buying houses indeed reflects instant, popular, and simple thoughts while building houses relates to complex, traditional, and ceremonial thoughts. Besides, taking a house examines final thing on result rather than building houses that relates to process (Barker, 2014:111). This final thing is also known as business thing rather than building house as social aspect. Modern people see house as house stock to be regularly sold and bought but traditional ones keep house as home by understanding its complexity in its values for family members. The difference between house and home is deep meaning that may come to those who live in it (Pugiarto, 1993:20).

In addition, modern people buy houses by their richness in material aspects while traditional ones see richness of houses in its values. This article would like to expose how traditional people, especially Javanese people, appreciate their values in house construction. They do not just buy houses but they own the land and then build a house through several steps that are full of symbolic values as related with their cultural habits. These symbolic values could be seen in slametan as a ceremony that is completed with special utensils.

**SLAMETAN IN JAVANESE PEOPLE'S LIFE**

*Slametan* is an event in Javanese wisdom or *kejawen, which* walks together with modern religions in philosophical ways (Santosa, 2012:252). Javanese people to celebrate, to note, or even to commemorate special events usually do that event. It is
because Javanese people always appreciate any special event in their life including day of birth, blessing for children, marriage rituals, rice harvest, and decease of people, or even house construction, which shows many marks in life. That word comes from *slamet* that means fortune or *sugeng so* that it is done to bless any event to be fortunate in life of people (Pugiarto, 1993:18). The fortune is marked by special utensils called *ubo rampe* that symbolizes importance of dynamic in everyday life.

*Slametan* consists of some actions; socialization, praying together, and eating together. These actions relate to both material (food and utensils) and spiritual aspects (praying) of life (Saboe in Sutrisno, 1985:144). In socialization, people used to talk each other in many topics. The main idea is to have interactive dialogues among other people. This aspect also relates to appreciating attendance of people and the dialogues itself. In praying together, this aspect appreciates relationships among God, human beings, and human nature. By praying together, people thank spiritual manifestations for fortune beside praying for people whom *slametan* is held (Santosa, 2012:18). The surroundings include vertical and horizontal relationships in concordances and interactions in life. In eating together, this action is strengthening people's relationships with each other. Togetherness in having fortune is the main idea here by eating special food provided in *slametan*. This is usually done after praying as a symbol for thanking people who have come to *slametan* and blessing goodness to everyone's life experience (Santosa, 2012:253).

**SLAMETAN IN STEPS OF JAVANESE HOUSE CONSTRUCTION**

The writers of this article have interviewed an old man named Mbah Mijo who lives in Sangkal village in Bantul to ask much information about *slametan*. He is known as a person who knows steps and *ubo rampe* as special utensils in *slametan*. He is used to give advices to others about Javanese way of life because he lives for a long
time in Yogyakarta. The information then will be listed in this following sub chapter to show steps, special utensils, and meanings of *slametan* especially to examine house construction or *mbangun omah*.

In the **first step**, groundbreaking ceremony is done by putting first foundation of the house. This event is called *bedhah bumi, pawitan, or peletakan batu pertama*. Since it is the first start, a good day is needed as symbol of fortune for the owner of the house. The good day, which is called *dinten ingkang sae utawa utomo*, could be determined from birthday in *pasaran* calendar called as *netu* or *neton*. This *neton* could be looked from the owner's family such as father's, mother's, or even children's. Beside that good day, it is also nice to avoid bad day such as the days of family's decease named *geblak, which may be commemorated*, but not to be celebrated. Good month, described as *wulan ingkang sae*, should also be chosen by avoiding bad months such as *suro, ruwah, or mulud*. Javanese people believe these months should be avoided because of any bad issue named *sukerta or sengkala* that may come.

Afterward, the owner of the house should prepare some utensils asserted as *ubo rampe*. An important part is flowers seen in its aesthetic, philosophical, and spiritual values. Flowers symbolically mean sincere, truthful, peaceful, sacred, and pure heart from human beings to God. This utensil is also used to pray for God's blessing whilst house construction. The aroma of the flowers (*wangine kembang*) means nice scent that spreads (*ngalir or sumrambah*) to all the way of the heart (*ngresep ing ati*). The flowers also should be taken in fresh, bloomed, clean, complete, unstolen, and unused condition. Moreover, the flowers should not be taken from graveyard soil but nice one.

The flowers needed are four specific garden flowers (*kembang setaman*) such as white champaca (*cempaka putih or kanthil*), jasmine (*melati or mlathi*), rose (*mawar*), and canangion or ylang flower (*kenanga*). First, white champaca or *kanthil*
comes from Javanese words *kanthi laku* that means human beings should have high effort to reach what they want. This word could also be found in *Serat Wedhatama* by Mangkunegara IV that stated "*ngelmu iku kalakone kanthi laku, lekase kalawan kas*" which means human beings in finding knowledge should always have sincere focus so that what he will find is good for himself and everyone near him (Santosa, 2012:109-110). *Kanthil* also comes from the word *kumanthil* which means always been brought, remembered, and commemorated. This word implicitly reminds people to always remember God as their Supreme Creator because they have limits, faults, and flaws in everything. Remembering God is also altered with *eling* followed with *waspada* means to be aware of surrounding (Pugiarto, 1993:24-25). Both *eling* and *waspada* are widely understood in *Serat Kalatidha* by Ranggawarsita. Second, jasmine flower means pure conscience taken from Javanese words *rasa melad saka jroning ati*. White color in jasmine symbolizes paternity in power that gives strength to human beings. What is said by mouth should be same with what is felt by heart so that body and mind be in peaceful concordance (Pugiarto, 1993:19). This concordance is to avoid bad dualism, as seen in the hypocrites, between body and mind and to make them walk in the same direction (*loro-loroning atunggil*).

As third, rose flower or *mawar* comes from Javanese word combination in *mawi arsa* and *awar-awar ben tawar*. *Mawi arsa* means strong effort should defeat any failure to reach something. Human beings should always have persistence and consistence in their hearts. *Awar-awar* means honesty, modest, and respect as seen in bareness without any cover at all while *tawar* means strength, sacredness, and no intention as understood in clear, clean, and tasteless water. Red color in rose means maternity that give birth and protection as examined in motherland too. Fourth, canangiun or ylang flower (*kenanga*) relates to *keneng-a* which means nobleness of
the predecessors and *kenang-en ing angga* that asserts reminder of nice things as exemplary for young people in later time.

Fifth, beside flowers, *tumpeng* rice in mountain-like form should be provided and made from white or yellow (turmeric-colored) rice. *Tumpeng* is acronym of *yen metu sing mempeng* that means any human should have strong intentions in reaching everything in life (Magnis-Suseno, 1984:89). The mountain-like form indicates Indonesian mountainous topographic and a place where spirits of predecessors live. This pointing-form also means human beings' intention to God as mentioned in the top and up beyond people. Sixth, a complete banana or *gedhang setangkep* is also needed as a symbol of nice and complete livestock. *Gedhang* comes from *digawe kadang* means people should well consider familiarities (*kekadhangan* or *paseduluran*). It also relates to *pitedah* or *pituduhe gesang* as guidances in life.

In next seventh, some boiled eggs are in the menu to remind people of their histories. Eighth, oval-like rice called *sega golong* is made from white rice meaning *golong-gilig* as owner's whole intention to build a house. Ninth, seven dishes and vegetables from traditional market should be provided in uncut but cooked condition to symbolize long life blessing for family of the house. Tenth, *bumbu urap* or *bumbu gudhangan* made from grated young coconut cooked in spicy or sweet taste. This *bumbu* means a source which could unite diverse conditions. Other eleventh dish includes *pala gumantung* of fresh fruits such as papaya, mangosteen, snake fruit, and *duku*. Twelfth, boiled *pala kapendhem* such as sweet potato, cassava, peanuts, and yam. Thirteenth, watery fruit named *pala kasimpar* are provided such as watermelon, melon, and cantaloupe to symbolize diversities in food.

Other cooking is also prepared; cooked sticky rice or *ketan* that comes from Arabian word *khotan* meaning fault and Javanese word *kraketan* meaning closeness.
This ketan intends to remind of their fault and to forgive other's fault to tighten relationships as fourteenth utensil. Kolak which consists of cooked banana, sweet potato, and sweet coconut milk, comes from Arabian word Khaliq means God so this food symbolizes nice relationships between Supreme Creator and his creations in fifteenth utensil. Apem made from rice flour comes from Arabian word afwan means forgiveness so that this food remind people to always ask forgiveness to God and other human beings as well for sixteenth utensil. Seventeenth, Rujak Degan, made from assorted fresh fruit and sliced young coconut, is provided to symbolize lilo legawa as willingness in life to accept anything that may come. Eighteenth, some money is prepared in a closed envelope to be taken by religious preacher. Nineteenth, burning incense is needed to bring in nice smell, to help concentration in praying, to symbolize relations between human beings and God, and to awaken sacred praying condition.

After everything is prepared and the day has been chosen, slametan will be done from burning incense before praying, praying together based on each religious view, until eating tumpeng together. This process will be done together by the owner, people who help the construction, religious preacher, and invited neighbors (Santosa, 2012:18). Any left food will be given to other people to spread fortune too. After this part is done, house construction could be started and continued until munggah molo event begins.

Second step is not different from the first one but added some utensils. Installing roof or munggah molo or pasang blandar is important for Javanese people since it symbolically ask God's blessing for next step of the construction and after it would finish later. In this event, choosing day and ubo rampe are also needed. In this munggah molo event, any utensil in slametan shows relations between the house, the family, God, and surroundings.
The utensils are more complex than before. First, *tebu wulung* is a kind of sugar cane. *Tebu* is derived from *anteping kalbu* meaning persistent heart and *wulung* means excellence. Fortune heart is the purpose in presence of that sugar cane. Second, a bundle of rice to symbolize prosperity that may come to house and people inside. Third, a complete banana of *gedhang raja* with its trunk and stem as symbol for one only house construction, for father to be leader and king who govern well in the family, and whole unity among family members. Fourth, Indonesian flag to assert nationalism. Fifth, ivory palm or *kelapa gading* that means honesty and persistence of family members. Its yellow color in the palm examines prosperity or *kamulyan*. Sixth, agathi leaves or *godhong turi* that shows openness in the family in any advice that may come. Seventh, *daun awar-awar* or *godhong aver-aver* as a symbol for freehearted people. Eighth, spear grass or *godhong alang-alang* as a symbol that this life will always face obstacles and people have to be ready for it. Ninth, leaves of snake fruit or *godhong salak* that comes from *selak* means immediate action so that any problems should always be immediately done without any delay. Tenth, leaves of banyan tree or *godhong ringin* as a symbol for protection and cool or *eyup* situation.

Eleventh, green chirayta leaves or *godhong sambiroto* as a symbol that everyone has to be ready to face any handicap in life. Twelfth, tiger's claw leaves or *godhong dadap serep* that relates to *asrep* or cool condition and *sumerep* or knowing situation so that people could use knowledge in choosing what is good and bad. Thirteenth, *apa-apa* tree in hoping fortune or *slamet* without any bad thing that may happen. Fourteenth, leaves of breadfruit or *godhong kluwih* that relates to *luwih* and *linuwih* mean more better things as bringing in goodness to the house. Fifteenth, *godhong koro* comes from Javanese word *sikara* means bad deeds so that this leave means to avoid bad aspect in house construction and its settlement afterward.
Sixteenth, white cotton or *kapas putih* means pure intention and its light weight means willingness to help others. Seventeenth, golden needle or *dom mas* as a symbol for peace condition or *tentrem* that may be situated in the house.

Those seventeen utensils are provided in keeping nice concordance between human beings, nature beings, and God. Those things are also related to green nature in cool and nice condition or *ijo royo-royo*. Slametan in this *munggah molo* event is meant to ask God's blessing for the house especially for protection and shelter from bad things that may come. As usual, slametan contains several steps from praying until eating together. The purpose is to spread fortune among people and to avoid bad physical or spiritual intentions (Santosa, 2012:69).

In the **third step**, before first settlement of the house, cleaning or *tetebah* needs to be done to put away bad intentions from inside or outside of the house. Utensils in this slametan are the same with first and second step but the difference is on the intentions. Slametan is meant to pray together in owner's religion so that it may conform to spiritual view (Mulder in Sutrisno, 1985:160). This event would like to ask for better protection of the house. Besides, by inviting other people, this slametan will also tell them about new house and neighbor near them. By eating together, this event is completed with *syukuran* or *kenduri* as symbol for thanking God and other human beings as a symbol that the owner has succeeded in building the house (Santosa, 2012:17).

This *tetebah* event reflects both physical and non-physical issues of house and family inside. In physical aspect, asking neighbors to come means nice intentions to live in a new place. This is also nice for foundation of the house since it can not be built unless got many helps from other people. Other people may also keep the house so that nice interactions could always happen among the family and others. In non-
physical aspect, spiritual things between human beings, nature beings, and God are important to be kept together. Many bad and unseen things should be kept away from the house and it could only be done by praying or ngaturaken pandonga slamet to Supreme Being (Pugiarto, 1993:19). It is also nice for shelter and protection as it is the main purpose of the house. For people inside it, non-physical aspect also includes peace, nice, and tidy condition that may come together with people's life alongside with great blessing of God.

**SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF SLAMETAN**

Having slametan in house construction is not without reason at all. Javanese people do it because they appreciate any kind of commemoration in life. Special events are remembered through praying and eating together with neighbors and families to remind people of peaceful condition that needs to be realized from time to time (Santosa, 2012:92). There is also fortune to be prayed to God as His blessing. Besides, slametan also means to keep traditions to be longing in society and as cultural inheritance for next generation. It is because slametan is not just about a feast but meaningful event that contains values of life. Everything in slametan such as choosing good day and ubo rampe reflects symbolic and implicit meanings rather than explicit ones. It is what people believe in everyday life of their cultural ideas.

Those symbolic meanings relate to cosmological, contextual, mythical, cultural, and social aspects. In cosmological aspect, there is a close relationship between human as small world or micro cosmos called as jagad cilik and universe as big world or cosmos described as jagad gedhe (Hadiwijono in Sutrisno, 1985:5). That relationship is interactive so that what people do will affect the world and in reverse. Body and mind should always be in balance with the whole universe or manunggal (Pugiarto, 1993:33) as seen in slametan as appreciation of that relationship (Magnis-
Suseno, 1984:89). In aspect of *jagad cilik*, understanding own acts could oversee self as independent part that may have strong effort to reach anything. Meanwhile, *jagad cilik* is also limited to others’ deeds so that any freedom should always come together with respect to *jagad gedhe*. In aspect of *jagad gedhe*, universe has its own order that include human beings, nature beings, and God himself. This order should be known and understood so that any deed may not disturb the harmony and balance described as *keselarasan* (Pugiarto, 1993:36-37). Human beings should never exploit nature beings just for himself by acting as God. *Jagad cilik* is actually just a small part of the universe but that part is important for harmonious universe so that awareness needs to be asserted anywhere and anytime. Knowing and understanding relations between *jagad cilik* and *jagad gedhe* could bring in peaceful heart or *katentremaning ati* to human beings (Magnis-Suseno, 1984:216).

Contextual aspect relates to what is lived and understood by people in everyday life among their surroundings (Smith and Riley, 2009:11). These people know that they do not just live alone but also with others. *Slametan* is seen in view of contextual side of events and commemoration of interactions among people. The events are so special that may reflect the context of life. What Javanese people in slametan or any other ethical event understands only relates to their everyday life since there is no one universal view for everything (Magnis-Suseno and Reksosusilo in Sutrisno, 1985:17). This saying also indicates that anyone including Javanese people should know contextual aspect of culture in where they stand.

Mythical aspect then examines any kind of thing that could not be seen by bare eyes. It is not ghost but spiritual as well as metaphysical things that could only be understood by cultivating mind or *olah rasa* (Pugiarto, 1993:43). *Slametan* defines beliefs of anything that is beyond people. This could be divided into three things but
could not be separated in instance. One is about religious view of people. It is known that *slametan* and its utensils are not in contrast with any religious view since it is also followed by praying to God. It is like acculturation of beliefs between religion and local culture without trying to diminish each other. Two is about local belief that still relates to animism. Javanese people believe in souls that possess spiritual essence supernaturally while any utensil in *slametan* represents goodness and kindness in life. These souls need to be appreciated but not to be obeyed or even worshipped at all. These kinds are in equal positions to human beings which are creations of Supreme Being or God or *Gusti*. This appreciation is important to see deeper relationship between internal and external aspects of human beings so that they may consider everything in their deeds. Three is about concordance of natural elements among human and nature beings. Since both human and nature are God's creations, they share same elements in way of *slamet* (Magnis-Suseno, 1984:89). If human beings would like to have good life, they have to share it too with nature beings. In subjectism, it is known that human is center of the world but not in Javanese view, which examines universe as a whole. By closing eyes and listen to the sound of nature, human beings could feel their unity with natural wide. Both religions and animism talk about the concordance that goes beyond bodily things to higher ground. Mythical understanding is wider than merely doctrines because it teaches people to open their inner eyes to feel anything that may be far or near from them.

Cultural aspect relates to fixed and dynamic structures of people (Smith and Riley, 2009:2). In fixed side, cultural aspect is understood only to specific place and people. *Slametan* is only known in Javanese culture as a tradition that has been told and practiced in decades. Today, some people do not completely prepare *ubo rampe* for *slametan* but its purpose to ask God’s blessing by praying and to invite other people.
in eating together is still the same to slamet or fortune for people. Dynamic aspect of people is related to slametan as habit in asking and giving fortune. This habitual event reflects acts of appreciating, thanking, and living together with nature. Peace, harmony, and conformity are the purposes of this habit. This habit recognizes both natural systems in the universe as well as human's actions in everyday life so that those sides may walk together in appropriate conditions.

Social aspect of slametan examines interactions among people (Mulder in Sutrisno, 1985:160). By inviting others to the event including families and neighbors, the house owner open that house to be attended by people. This could bring better possibilities rather than keeping everything in closed conditions. Slametan indicates that people could not live alone but with others. Helping each other is not about a must but an opportunity to practice kindness with others (Pugiarto, 1993:28). By doing this, bad intentions such as sayings or deeds could be avoided because persons have dialogues to each other interactively. Besides, slametan also reflects dialogues among people which is intersubjective in appreciating others as equal as own self and also interpersonal in knowing and understanding what others and society have in cultural understandings.

CONCLUSION

Slametan is an event held to build harmony between human beings, nature entities, and God. Human beings and nature entities are horizontal surroundings of people while God or Pangeran is beyond of them. Javanese people believe that nature should always be appreciated including in house construction event. Living among nature is such a destiny but appreciating and conforming to it is a choice. Slametan means to bring in people into collective aspects of universe in their life. This collective one also includes proper appreciation to the process rather than easily enjoy products
as results. *Slametan* that is full of cosmological until social values, as stated above, spare people to stop from their daily activities to reflect about their inner and outer world.

This event could propose better understanding with religion and traditional belief besides contrasting it in good or bad aspects. As seen in concordance between human and nature beings, doctrines of religions are coming together with traditions in everyday life. This togetherness could be seen in how people behave and act in everyday life. *Slametan* does not mean to worship ancient souls instead of God. People just need to appreciate every entity that they may live side by side. Ignoring what is mythical and cosmological actually also rejects God's existence because He states Himself in those two understandings. In mythical aspect, God is seen in what He creates but not merely the creations itself. In cosmological aspect, God is universe containing diversities; so universal but also particular as well. To eliminate a side between religion or cultural tradition will just omit richness of human beings in how they live in harmony between doctrines and practices.

Besides, richness of values in traditional way actually reflects meaningful condition. This side is very different from modern way that is only related to consumptions without knowing how it is made. For example, many children in modern cities do not know how rice field and its plant seem because they just eat it. Meanwhile, traditional people know their surroundings very well. They play, live, and work in there so that they know what kind of utensils used in many traditional rituals. While modern people could only use items, traditional people use things by living the meanings in traditions. It can be said that modern and traditional ways are still relevant to each other in their existence of living together.
REFERENCES