Slametan and Tradition in Pengakuan Pariyem: An Expression of Equality in Javanese Culture

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Slametan and Tradition in Pengakuan Pariyem: An Expression of Equality in Javanese Culture

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Abstract
Pengakuan Pariyem is a controversial novel portraying a confession of Pariyem, a woman living in Javanese culture. Through this novel, we are able to see Javanese culture from the eyes of a Javanese woman. This paper presents an analysis on Javanese tradition, more specifically the practice of slametan in Javanese culture as it is depicted in the novel. There are ideals of life shown in Javanese culture and tradition. Slametan and the use of food in it suggest equal relations among people in Javanese culture. The equality is built to maintain the conformity to achieve harmony among these people. Even though the equality has contradictory sides, Pariyem is able to actively engage as a subject in her society and live harmoniously in it.

Keywords:
Pengakuan Pariyem, slametan, equality, Javanese ethics

Pengakuan Pariyem (The Confession of Pariyem) is a memoir of a Javanese woman. Published in the 80’s, it was a controversial work of the time. Pengakuan Pariyem is a lyrical prose telling a story of a young woman named Pariyem, who is living in Wonosari, a small village in Gunungkidul. She devoted her life as a servant in a Javanese noble family. As a woman raised in the low class of Javanese society, Pariyem expresses her inner musings and shows her attitude on people and life. Pariyem fully accepts her life as a reflection of lega lila, a concept of showing a full acceptance and gratitude of life in Javanese culture. This attitude is also shown when she has an unexpected baby as a result of her affair with the son of the noble family she serves. Eventually, she delivers the baby and is still grateful of the baby’s existence as though nothing has never been wrong about the affair.

The controversial story in Pengakuan Pariyem gave a new color in Indonesian literature in the 80’s, where talking about sex was still a taboo for many people. Pengakuan Pariyem, written by Linus Suryadi Ag, is a story that is still read nowadays as it depicts how a Javanese woman acts and thinks. The Javanese tradition depicted in this novel is told from Pariyem’s eyes, a woman with a Javanese background. As controversial the novel was when it was published more than two decades ago, there is an opportunity to continue to analyze the story for an alternate perspective in this modern society.

Many studies have been conducted in reading Pengakuan Pariyem from various perspectives, but it is difficult to find a paper on how slametan and the traditions in Java depicted in the novel relate to Pariyem’s perspective. Slametan and the traditions are used to illustrate culture in Java as well as to explain the Javanese

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way of life, and they are keys to understand Pariyem’s perspective on life as a Javanese woman.

Most researchers talk about Pariyem as the main character without elaborating much about Javanese tradition as the socio-political and historical context (Rahmawati, 2014; Harni, 2009; Puspitasari, 2015; Saraswati, 2010). Finding almost similar results, they agree that in the novel Pariyem is a subordinated self as a servant who is not able to defend herself of being treated rather unluckily in a patriarchal society and to free herself from the domination of priyayi (the governing upper class in traditional Javanese society). The papers conclusively end readings on Pariyem as a passive character in Pengakuan Pariyem. Other researchers discuss the Javanese tradition and Javanese philosophy without in-depth analysis on Pariyem as the main character, despite her significant role as the confessor in this novel. Several academics have studied Javanese philosophy from this novel and identified Javanese characteristics such as urirman (being able to accept life as it is), lega lila (being grateful for the condition), or andap asor (being humble), which reflect the main purpose of Javanese wisdom of building harmony (Nugroho, 2012; Sari, Suseno, Mulyono, 2013; Listiani, 2014). Those papers prove that culture and the Javanese system of culture cannot be separated in analyzing Pengakuan Pariyem. Moreover, because of its importance, Javanese culture and belief do not only function as a base for the development of the story but also as the instrument of the story.

Soemanto (1999) and Esti (2013) analyzed Pengakuan Pariyem with regard to the culture as the context in the meaning-making, and they examined the novel rather differently from the prior research. Soemanto scrutinized the universe that is created in Pengakuan Pariyem. The events in the novel are analyzed as a relational coherence which makes a whole linking chain of Pariyem’s world. Not analyzing specifically on the character, Soemanto’s study results in the idea that Pariyem’s world is not a mimetic world. Instead, it is a representational world, which is made of Javanese culture system, a place which Pariyem creates and lives in, which is a combination of the modern and the traditional world. On the other hand, Esti (2013) analyzed the main character and gender relation. She examined how Pariyem accepts her genealogic descendant and her position as a servant because, in Javanese culture, people should live like water, flowing with the course of life. She argued that even though she has unlucky genealogy and status, Pariyem is able to engage actively in her life and to participate actively in public domain as men do. The two papers include Javanese culture in the analyses of the main character, but the researchers do not discuss the more specific Javanese tradition like slametan.

Literary critics end up in different perspectives when they discuss the controversial issues in the prose lyric of Pengakuan Pariyem by Linus Suryadi. Some focus on the problem of gender relation where as a woman in Java, Pariyem, a village-born woman serving for a middle-class family in town, ill-treated within the dominant patriarchal society. There is also an argument that as the main character in the novel, Pariyem’s submission to life is considered as a struggle, especially in the feminist point of view. Rather than passive, she actively engages to be a subject in her society.

This article addresses the life of Pariyem in quite a different way. We consider the character of Pariyem in terms of a discursive practice where through her characterization, we can examine socio-political and historical aspects of the story although to some extent we still consider the character psychologically. In doing so, we can shift from considering Pariyem as a self into a subject, which allows us to argue that Pariyem is a social and discursive structure that contains contradictions. Secondly, the discursive character reading paves us the way to think of Pariyem as representation rather than to naively perceive it as a realistic reflection of an individual person. In this respect, we can situate both the novel as the primary text and other secondary texts in an equal position. For the main discussion, we focus on the use of slametan, which is a widely-discussed issue in Javanese lifecycles but tends to be overlooked in discussing the character of Pariyem so far.
DISCUSSION

In *Pengakuan Pariyem*, belief and religion for Javanese people are not two different entities, and they are depicted gracefully through metaphors as Pariyem tells her life story. Pariyem is a Catholic, a common religion in her hometown in Wonosari, Gunung Kidul, Yogyakarta. Her Christian name is Maria Magdalena, given by a Catholic priest Van de Moutten. Even though she never graduated from school, Pariyem once studied in Kanisius elementary school in Wonosari. Pariyem explicitly stated that she is a Catholic and *Kejawen* at the same time. However, it is common for Javanese to have a formal religion along with *Kejawen*. We can see this from the excerpt:

“yes, yes, I am Pariyem and my belief is:
Javanese Mythic
But on my identification card
I am Catholic

I was baptized by rama, a Dutch Father

So clearly, being clear:
--my belief is Catholic Mystic

*Kejawen* is a belief which most people in Java have as the basis of their way of life. Mulder (1970) said that *Kejawen* is a multilayered character or attitude which connects the everyday life, people, and nature.

The attitude of life may be heavily influenced by religious experience and religious concepts. The Javanese experience and view are totalistic, not separating the individual from his environment, from his group, or even from nature and supernature. This worldly and the other-worldly are equally unclear as well as equally real. (Mulder, 1970)

More specifically, Hakam (2017) defines *Kejawen* as the mystical ideal of unity and harmony which holds three aspects in Javanese life: the relationship among humans, the relationship between human and nature and relationship between human and God. In order to build these harmonious relationship, people should be able to sacrifice their self by not imposing their will for the sake of harmony. There is an interdependent relationship among humans that a person cannot have the condition of being slamet if other people still do not allow it. This idea eventually constructs a bigger view: the relationship between the microcosm (individual human) and the macrocosm (the universe). The microcosm and the macrocosm are always inter-reliant, which make having two different beliefs, Catholic and *Kejawen*, is not a sin.

The Javanese in *Pengakuan Pariyem* accept their belief (*Kejawen*) as their way to perform everyday life and accepts their religion (Catholics) as the inner way or a private aspect of life. Because they are also *Kejawen*, Catholics or Muslims in Java still practice traditional rituals...
like *slametan*. Pariyem describes the idea of religion and belief as follows:

“Bukankah agama, begitu kata orang tua kita yang arif dan bijaksana, adalah ibarat pakaian?”

*Agama ageming ati Dan tiap bangsa punya tata, punya acara yang percuma diganggu-gugat siapa pun”*  
*(Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 19)*

“Isn’t it religion, as what the wise and the prudent elders said, is like clothes?”

religion is *ageming ati* (the cover of the heart) and every race has its own ways which cannot be inviolated by anyone”  
*(Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 19)*

The Javanese, according to Pariyem, is a society which has its own rules of conduct, shown by her statement “*Dan tiap bangsa punya tata, punya acara, yang percuma diganggu-gugat siapa pun*”. She believes that the rules cannot be violated by anyone. One of them is to accept religion as “*ageming ati*” (the cover of the heart), which expresses as the embodiment of the heart’s will. On the other hand, Pariyem also shows her belief through her names. She has two names, her birth name (Pariyem) and her Christian name (Maria Magdalena). The expression of her balance of the microcosm and macrocosm is represented by her two names, with each has its own meaning. She always uses Pariyem in her daily life and only uses her Christian name for formal administrative business. On daily occasions, she refuses to be called Maria Magdalena; she wants people to call her Pariyem or Iyem instead because it is the name her parents gave her.

“ya, ya, Pariyem saya Maria Magdalena Pariyem lengkapnya Iyem panggilan sehari-harinya dari Wonosari Gunung Kidul

Apabila suatu hari kita bertemu
Jangan panggil saya Maria
jangan panggil saya Magda
Tapi panggil saya Pariyem

*Iha orang tua saya memanggil Iyem kok!”*  
*(Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 16)*

“yes, yes, I am pariyem Maria Magdalena Pariyem my full name “Iyem” is the nickname from Wonosari Gunung Kidul
When someday we meet
Don’t call me Maria
Don’t call me Magda
But call me Pariyem

…well as my parents call me Iyem”  
*(Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 16)*

Pariyem prefers to be called as Iyem, and not Maria or Magda, because her parents call her that way. It shows her respect to the elders, not only parents but also people who are older or have a higher position in the family because kinship in Javanese culture plays an important role as a status and a personality. Mulder (1983, p. 262) emphasizes this notion saying:

Parents have the duty to see to it that their children "become human" (*dadi wong*), that is, become fully Javanese, with an adequate knowledge of Javanese manners, customs, and culture, in order to become accepted and respected members of the community. Consequently, children should obey their parents, following their advice and honoring them.

Because of the same reason, Pariyem also states many times in the novel that her status is as a woman from Gunung Kidul, born in a farmer’s family and lives as a servant. Being born into the world, brought and raised by the parents are an important aspect of Pariyem’s life. She expresses her thankfulness by acknowledging her parents, her family and her background as a woman born in Wonosari, Gunung Kidul, a region in Java, her homeland. Pariyem shows that this is important as she gives repeats it throughout the novel.

“ya, ya, Pariyem saya Maria Magdalena Pariyem lengkapnya Iyem panggilan sehari-harinya dari Wonosari Gunung Kidul
Pariyem repeats this statement every time she begins an event or ends an event in her story, from the beginning to the end of this novel. This can be seen as her expression of her identity and by the repetition emphasizes how important it is for her. We can draw further conclude that Javanese people, represented by Pariyem in this novel, are expected to be aware of their position and background in the society.

Pariyem is fully aware of her position as a servant from Wonosari, Gunung Kidul. Even though she has a beautiful formal name, Maria Magdalena, she rarely uses it. Pariyem thinks her birth name is more proper for a servant like her. She believes that by not using all the names she has and by a proper use of the name for the right time, place and situation, she shows gratitude and sincerity to life. Her Christian name is a holy name which cannot be used in every situation because it reflects the religious matter. This idea can be seen from the excerpt:

Bukankah keyakinan, begitu kata nenek moyang kita, pada hakekatnya adalah sumber kekuatan? Tak pantas diobral sembarangan Lha, jika saya tetap nekad juga O, bisa kacau-balau jagad dalam saya yang tinggal hanya kekosongan

...(Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 15)

Isn’t it belief, as what is said by the ancestors, that are truly is the source of power? Inappropriate to disclose it carelessly eh, if I still refuse to risk it whoa, my inner world is messed only emptiness stays

...(Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 15)

In this excerpt, Pariyem implies that religion is a private aspect of someone’s life and it is inappropriate to show it to public. This also applies to Pariyem’s life as a Javanese woman and this is a way to respect the very private life of a person in Javanese culture. The inappropriate use of names indicates non-conformity, which violates the roles given by God and nature and will ruin the rule of conducts in Javanese culture and social system and consequently affect peacefulness of life. Mulder (1983, p. 264) describes this idea as follows:

Being respectful to others means to be accepted and respected in return and is essential for maintaining proper order while achieving slamet. Consequently, open conflict should be avoided, it always is wise to maintain conformity. Ambition, the search for personal gain and competitiveness are regarded as being disruptive to the communal order and contrary to the requirements of harmony and equilibrium.

As explained in the excerpt, Javanese ethics advise that all the entities in the world have one specific purpose to build harmony. In Javanese culture, tata karma (etiquette) is an important thing. The basis of Javanese ethics relies in rasa, the way human feels harmony (Magnis-Soeseno, 1997). It becomes the underlying ground for all traditional practices and tradition.

Slametan, as a part of Javanese tradition, is an event of gratitude for the life given and of a condition of well being to achieve harmony. The inner recognition of self identity and the goal to achieve harmony are expressed through the ritual slametan. Geertz in Mulder (1983, p.261) explains further about slametan as follows:

The core ritual in the attempt to sustain, maintain, or redress order is the slametan, that is, the communal socio-religious meal in which neighbors along with some relatives and friends participate. Such slametan are held at all life-crisis
from the eighth month of pregnancy to the thousandth day after death), at communal cyclical occurrences (especially the bersib-desa or annual village festival accompanied by certain purification rites), and on all sorts of occasions where the community’s well-being and equilibrium have been disturbed (Geertz 1960: 11-15, 30-85, in Mulder 1983, p.261).

Geertz describes slametan as the core ritual in Javanese tradition. This ritual has been discussed and speculated by many researchers (Hilmy 1999; Keeler 1987; Bowen 1993; Geertz,1960; Woodward, 1989; and Beatty,1999), who conducted their research mainly in central or east Java. Those researchers used slametan as their starting point in examining Javanese tradition, because only through slametan, the community’s well-being and equilibrium can be achieved (Newberry, 2006: 16; Hakam, 2017: 100).

Slametan is a fundamental ritual way that community is recognized and reproduced on a daily basis (Newberry, 2006). The condition of being slamet in Javanese, derived from the Arabic word Salam, means a condition of being safe and no harms will happen (Geertz, 1960; Kristanto, 2016) and that is why the tradition is named slametan. It is the key ritual in Javanese tradition because it reflects the Javanese ethics, culture, and knowledge. Along with Mulder’s statement, Hakam (2017, p. 100) agrees that slametan is a feast that is one of the most widely practiced rituals in Java. In addition, Kistanto also states that Javanese Slametan is considered not only as a distinctive and unique socio-religious ritual practiced by the Javanese, but it also serves as a traditional media which identifies the spiritual and social expression of the Javanese. At this point, Slametan unifies and harmonizes the Javanese communities as collectivities. (2016, p. 291). In Javanese culture, all the elements of Javanese time and place, rotate based on one point that is the wellbeing, the harmony, and then all the people shall have been slamet (Permanadeli, 2015, p. 98). When all the people are slamet, the world is balanced and harmonious, and this is the main goal of Javanese culture and these are the reasons of the importance slametan in Javanese culture.

Widely used as the central ritual in Javanese tradition, slametan is a manifestation of Javanese spiritual values, the base Javanese social structure and a way to maintain the sustainability of Javanese belief. From this point of view, we understand that slametan is an important rite in Javanese tradition. In addition, how slametan is described and used in Pengakuan Pariyem can be used further to understand these Javanese ideals.

Slametan is one of Javanese practice which is full of many important values. Geertz (1960) describes slametan as a simple and formal rite where all people gather as one unity and it can be held for various opening or closing of important events as it also embraces every person and all other aspects of nature in one humble ceremonial event. In Pengakuan Pariyem, the practice of slametan is described in the excerpt below, showing a specific event when people in the village welcome a newborn baby, which is called as Sepasaran:

Sepasaran, bahasa populernya
Maka tersedia tikar di lantai, di tanah:
Jenang abang: lambang kesucian si jabang bayi
Jenang putih: lambang cahaya yang menerangi Alam
Ingkung ayam: lambang keutuhan badan wadhag telanjang
Nasi tumpeng dan gudhangan: lambang pergaulan hidup yang kelak memperkaya pengalaman… (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 3)

Sepasaran, It is usually called
Mats on the floor, on the ground:
Jenang abang: symbol of baby’s purity
Jenang putih: symbol of shining light (to) Nature
Ingkung ayam: symbol of body unity
Bare naked
Tumpeng and gudhangan: symbol of life relationships which will enrich experience… (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 3)
Sepasaran is one type of slametan, which is specifically purposed to welcome the arrival of a baby to the family. It is usually held around 5 to 7 days after the baby is born. This kind of slametan is held when the stub of the baby’s umbilical cord falls off, and it is 5 or 7 days subsequent to the birth (Geertz, 2005). In Pengakuan Pariyem, slametan is narrated not only for sepasaran of the birth of Pariyem, but also for the birth of Pariyem’s baby. The event is narrated as follows:

“setelah upacara mandi rampung ada pula kenduri di ruang depan warga seduam diundang datang datang menyelamati thuyul kami lihatlah, para tetangga berkalam berkalam duduk menghadapi ambeng: Gudhangan, nasi golog, nasi tumpeng Ingkung ayam jagoan dan jajanan Lengkap dengan berpiring Jenang” … (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 216)

“After bathing ceremony there is kenduri in the front room all people in the village are invited to come come to bless our baby look, the neighbors are coming come and sit before the food: Gudhangan, nasi golog, nasi tumpeng Ingkung ayam jagoan and jajanan Complete with plates of jenang” … (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 216)

In this novel, slametan is illustrated with people gathering, sitting together on the mats, facing the food. All the neighbors are invited and all of them attend the ritual to give blessing to the newborn baby. Slametan in this novel is described similar to as Hakam describes: it is an event where all the guests are sitting in circular or semi-circular shape and the dishes usually are placed in the middle (Hakam, 2017). Geertz in Mulder, explains that this kind of sitting arrangement has a specific purpose:

At slametan all the participants enjoy the same ritual status, each person presents contributing equally to the spiritual potency of the event. Such slametan, therefore, serve to demonstrate harmonious unity (rukun) among the participants while invoking the blessing of the gods, spirits, and ancestors, who are formally invited to be present (Geertz 1960: 11-15, 30-85, in Mulder 1983, p.261).

From this two descriptions, we know that the sitting arrangement in slametan is symbolic: all people sit together on the floor so they can sit on the same level. They also sit together in semi-circular shape to show that no one is more privileged than the other. How people position themselves in slametan shows us that Javanese culture places all people in the same position and level.

In the excerpt, people in slametan will pray before the food to ask for blessings on behalf of the baby and the family. In the excerpt, Pariyem tells that “there is kenduri in the front room”. This statement is similar to what Hakam describes in slametan as all men are sitting in the front part of the house, can be the porch and the living room, and the women are at the back of the house, usually at the kitchen and inner rooms. (Hakam, 2017: 100).

Food, however, plays another important role in slametan, as it is shown in the excerpt. There are several important dishes mentioned in the two excerpts above: jenang abang (red sticky rice pudding), jenang putih (white sticky rice pudding), ingkung ayam (whole roasted/fried chicken), tumpeng (cone-shaped yellow rice), gudhangan (side dish), and nasi golog (rice ball). As one of the jajanan (cake and snacks), jenang abang is a sweet meat made from sticky rice, palm sugar and coconut milk. The color red (abang) is from the palm sugar. Similar to jenang abang, jenang putih is also made from sticky rice and coconut milk but without the palm sugar, and this make the color stays white (putih). Ingkung ayam is whole roasted/fried chicken served cut open from neck to bottom to show the insides. Tumpeng is the signature dish for slametan, a cone-shaped yellow rice (the color comes from turmeric) and gudhangan is the side dish of tumpeng.

As stated in the excerpt (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 3), all kinds of the foods have their own meaning related to what the life means in Javanese perspective, that all the humans, nature and deities have interdependence relationship
to God. Jenang abang symbolizes the purity of the baby and jenang putih symbolizes light shining towards nature. Ingkung ayam symbolizes body unity; presented as bare naked, it symbolizes the purity of a newly-born human. Tumpeng symbolizes true dignity, prosperity and a philosophy that all connected aspects of nature have one source and end: God. Gudhangan symbolizes life relationships which hopefully will enrich the experience of the baby later on.

Not only becomes the center of the ritual ceremony, food in slametan also shows relationships of all the people in the village.

“Sehabis didongakan oleh mbah kaum diikuti dan disertai rasa khidmat lalu dibagi-bagikan; rata dan sepadan mbok rondho mbok rondho diperhitungkan”

… (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 216)

“After prayer led by mbah kaum followed and accompanied with solemnity the food is shared: even and proportionate widows are taken into account”

… (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 216)

All men and women, parents and children are invited in slametan, and not one person is left behind. Everyone in the neighborhood is invited and they have to attend slametan to pray together for a blessing for the host. The people in slametan will share the food and have meal together. However, not all the dishes will be eaten; they will also bring the food for their family at home and share it with them (Hakam, 2017: 101). Furthermore, Newberry elaborates that slametan is not only a commensality ritual which connects houses and households, but it is a way of how the connection of the people in the village is woven through the exchange of food between houses, and families. It starts with the invitation of slametan, which is accompanied by a box of food, and then the woman guests will arrive bringing food for the host. The ceremony will start after all the man guests arrive. They will sit and pray before the food and share the meal in the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, all the guests will bring back the food for their family at home. The flow of the food beginning from the invitation up to the ending shows the relationship between all the people in the village is equal: everyone counts (Newberry, 2006: 15).

Javanese tradition similar to the practice of slametan, accepts all human beings and nature on an equal position. Geertz states that slametan puts all the people participating in the event on the same level, blurring the existing hierarchy. He argues, "in slametan, not every single person is differentiated, they are all accepted and from this togetherness, no one wants to separate from the common" (Geertz, 2009, p. 8). In hard situations, slamet shows that someone has been able to get through that condition, and it is similar to a baby that has been delivered safely with a healthy mother after the difficult process of delivery (Permanadeli, 2015). This is why it is necessary to have sepasaran, a slametan for newly born baby.

Slamet, symbolically, means fit for the moment, it is similar to when a person coincidently meets another person he has been wanted to meet. Thus, meeting someone is never a coincidence if it is understood using Javanese culture perspective, since Javanese think that coincidences represent the power of God to arrange all the events in the world, including the birth of a baby. Permanadeli adds that in Javanese culture, a baby is a gift from God, and the families are celebrating the arrival of the baby as well as expressing gratefulness for having a new life of a healthy baby by holding slametan. The baby however, arrives at the right moment, fits for the condition of the family. Thus, whatever the baby’s condition is, the family should be grateful and slametan is a way to express the gratitude.

In Pengakuan Pariyem, the family and also the neighbors celebrate the birth of the baby in sepasaran even though the baby is born out of wedlock. Pariyem was pregnant from her affair with Den Bagus Ario, a son of the priyayi family where she works. Even so, the baby is not regarded as a burden nor a bad luck for Pariyem, Pariyem's family, Den Bagus' family or even the people in the village. Pariyem thinks that the baby is as important as other people:

“O, saya tak menaruh keberatan

…

Saya tak menaruh pengharapan
Karena demikianlah nenek saya bilang:
Setiap anak yang lahir dari uga garba
Niscaya ada bapak dan ibunya
Sedang pengakuan dan pengingkaran
Tegantung rasa blaka dari dalam
Dan kelubahan lagi dunia luarnya”
… (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 188)

“O, I don’t mind
…
I don’t put any hope
Because that's how my grandma said:
Every child born from womb
shall always have father and mother
while acceptance and denial
depend on sincerity from the inside
and the tradition on the outside”
… (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 188)

As stated in the excerpt, Pariyem does not feel
any regret for having the baby. She feels that
the baby deserves the same position in life, a
good life as the others. We can see from the
excerpt that in Javanese culture, people believe
that every soul deserves an equal right. This
quality applies for every occasion in life. This
idea also becomes the reason for Pariyem to
hold slametan for her baby and she is not
ashamed of it.

The description and the use of slametan in
Pengakuan Pariyem show all people in Javanese
culture are equal. The equality is also shown by
Pariyem’s perspective for keeping the baby be-
cause even though the baby is not a legitimate
child of a married couple, it is a human who
deserves the equal position as others. Pariyem’s
decision in having slametan for the baby is also
accepted by the people in the village, as “all
people in the village are invited come…
look, the neighbors come swarming and sit be-
fore the food” (Pengakuan Pariyem, p. 216). All
the people in the village come to give their
blessing for the baby. At this point, Pariyem is
able to show that she is not ashamed of having
the baby, and the people in the village also ac-
cept the arrival of the baby by attending the
slametan.

Pariyem also says that she has no hope for
the baby: as long as the baby has father and
mother, the baby is complete. Pariyem thinks
that the acceptance or denial on the baby de-
PENDS on the inner and the outer side of a hu-
man being. Pariyem describes the inner side as
the sincerity of the heart, and the outer side as
the tradition. This idea is explained by Mulder
(1983, p. 265) that the inner is conceived as a
microcosm, and the outer is the macrocosm
(the Life). A good Javanese should be able to
live without social purpose or pamrib (egoism)
but should be motivated to live in tune with life
and destiny. Pariyem has not set any hopes for
the baby and accepts her as she is, this woman
proves that she does not have any personal
agenda or egoism. However, Pariyem is still
able to fulfill her social role as a mother, to de-
deliver the baby and to have the slametan as the
tradition in Javanese culture.

The Javanese society, as other society, how-
ever, bounds every person inside it with the so-
cial and historical conditions, whilst not to
leave psychological condition either. Pariyem
as a part of Javanese culture, cannot be sepa-
rated from her social construct. Mulder (1983,
p. 266) explains that in any circumstances, peo-
ple in Javanese culture can have their own faith
as long as they respect the social conduct. It in-
volves the realization of one's true self. In this
point of view, a self is then becoming a social
subject. A social subject, therefore, is forced
into a certain role and a certain appearance as
the outer side and at the same time, the subject
compensates the self-realization. Pariyem as a
woman in Javanese culture is able to demon-
strate that even though she is living in the cul-
ture of conformity, she can act actively as an
active subject.

Pariyem as a character with contradictions
in Pengakuan Pariyem novel, however, is not a
passive character. Although she is constructed
and bound in a Javanese culture, Pariyem has
performed and fulfilled her social identity, tra-
dition, and responsibility to maintain the sense
of togetherness in the community. Mulder
states that the togetherness in Javanese culture
somehow “is an attitude of passivity and it is
recognized as the means of maintaining per-
sonal and communal equilibrium and as being
conducive to attainment to the rather nega-
tively defined state of slamet” (Mulder 1983, p.
264). However, while maintaining the sense of togetherness, Pariyem also shows active engagement in conducting her own decision to hold slametan for her baby.

People in Javanese culture are supposed to build social harmony through ordered relation, social control, and overt self-humbleness. Therefore, the ethics of family and the ethics of the community should be the ethic of Javanese culture, which in this case is the paternalistic leadership, mutual assistance, observance of rukun (getting along with all people), and attendance of each other’s life-crisis rituals. As part of the society where strong humbleness and dignity of the self is vital, Pariyem should have been ashamed of having a baby as result of her extramarital affair. However, in her life, Pariyem is able to show that this contradiction can be managed as long as the act to maintain harmony is performed, and the effort is done through slametan.

**CONCLUSION**

By regarding Pariyem as a social and discursive structure in Pengakuan Pariyem novel, we can understand that there is a dualistic quality in the character. Pariyem as a social subject is able to obey and fulfill her obligation in the society. As a part of the Javanese society, she is able to perform her role as a woman living in Javanese culture. She accepts Javanese belief, respects her parents, and embraces her identity. On the other hand, Pariyem as a social subject is an independent subject who is able to create her will and fulfill her own decision as long as she is sincere and grateful for her life.

In Javanese culture, being sincere to life and being grateful are important. The capability to accept life sincerely is expressed in daily practices. To accept the condition of human as a part of the universe and to get along with the course of the universe is the way to achieve harmony, which is the goal of Javanese culture which rules the idea of equality. This can be achieved through the practices of traditions, especially slametan. Slametan, as described and used in this novel from Pariyem’s perspective, expresses the idea of equality.

**REFERENCES**


