

Cultural myth of eclipse in a Central Javanese village: Between Islamic identity and local tradition



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This article examines the relationship between religion, tradition and identity as seen from the myth about eclipses in a village in Central Java. Javanese people in rural areas still hold beliefs passed down from their ancestors about eclipses, both lunar and solar eclipses. Using a qualitative approach, the results of the study showed that the villagers believe that eclipses occur because of evil giants called *buto* named Batara Kala who try to devour the sun or the moon. This natural phenomenon is believed to bring disaster to pregnant women and livestock. To fight the disaster, they must perform certain ceremonies or rituals. Based on ethnographic studies, this research provides an overview of eclipse mythology for Javanese locals and analyses it from identity theory. This shows that mythical rituals reflect a continuous identity formation. Although the traditions associated with these myths to some extent transcend the boundaries of the Islamic religion, they remain unchallenged.

Contribution: This research suggests that myths play an important role in the life and identity of the people who believe in them and perform the rituals associated with them.

Keywords: eclipse; cultural myth; tradition; Islamic identity; Central Java.

Introduction

The practice of Islam in Java represents a combination of major religion and local traditions. This practice refers to the way the local community interprets religion as something important and sacred which is preserved along with traditional ancestral values. This practice is generally understood as syncretic by combining local traditions with divine aspects derived from major religions, particularly Islam. Javanese Islam modifies the view of divinity with tradition to accommodate and compromise theological and spiritual values between Islamic teachings and Javanese culture (Van Bruinessen 1992). Javanese Islam places great emphasis on the supernatural and spiritual aspects of natural signs and phenomena.

Despite the growing Islamisation and a gradual extinction of some local beliefs amid modernisation, especially among young people, such as *ketoprak* [performing arts], *wayang* [shadow puppets] and *sesajen* [offerings] to ancestors, the Javanese society strongly adheres to myths and local traditions. Besides this, the Javanese tradition also contains an order of social life which is manifested in the form of customs. The existence of ancient folklore that is passed down from one generation to another can form a myth that is believed by the society and has an influence on their lives.

The conception of divinity in religions places myth as an important reference, which can explain the position and role of supernatural powers in people's lives (Segal 1980). All of these describe theological concepts and constructions taken from mythical sources which were developed with local cultural settings. These local religions in Robert N. Bellah's (1967) concept are called civil religions or little tradition. All of these Islamic practices make myths as reinforcement of traditional teachings that are accommodated and modified by Islam. This form of religion involves not only a belief in God, but is also used as a group or ethnic identity (Purwadi 2004).

One of the natural phenomena that strengthens the supernatural beliefs of Javanese people is eclipse, either lunar or solar. Different from the modern view, Javanese people still adhere to the myth that during an eclipse, the moon or the sun is being preyed upon by a giant demon in Hindu mythology, called *buto* or Batara Kala (Jayusman 2011). To prevent this from happening, Javanese people will beat cooking utensils or drums to expel the *buto*. The tradition, which originates from Hindu mythology, is believed and preserved by Muslim Javanese communities in rural areas to this day. Traditional societies tend to perceive natural phenomena as a sign, either positive or

negative, for their personal and social life. In some traditional groups, eclipses are believed to bring supernatural threats, so they need to take precautions during eclipses (Legare et al. 2020). Javanese society also associates the eclipse with beliefs or myths happening in society or nature (Mujab 2014; Zaman 2016). Furthermore, Legare et al. (2020) in analysing cultural ecology showed that people in Bihar, India, believe that a solar eclipse signifies the coming of a natural disaster or the birth and death of a person.

This shows that myths about eclipses manifested in culture are associated with local identities regarding supernatural beliefs. Interestingly, traditional beliefs are sometimes not necessarily in line with the theological concepts built by the religion they embrace. To analyse this matter, this study attempts to investigate the compromising attitude of rural Javanese Muslims' supernatural beliefs and Islamic theological dimensions of eclipses. This study selected a village in Grobogan Regency named Banjarsari, located in the Kradenan sub-district. The people of Banjarsari are still steadfast in maintaining this belief. They perceive the supernatural value contained in it. For the villagers, the belief in the eclipse myths is a heritage that is connected to their cultural identity as Javanese people. The eclipse phenomenon in their view can bring disaster to pregnant women and livestock. The villagers believe that every time there is a lunar or solar eclipse, they need to perform a special ritual with the aim of repelling evil or preventing calamities. The cultural rituals carried out by the village communities during a lunar or solar eclipse are not only an effort to preserve ancestral heritage, but also a means for social identity as a group of people who believe in a natural phenomenon that is capable of bringing disaster.

This study attempts to show how Javanese Muslims maintain their hereditary traditions in the midst of the theological conception of Islam which has a different eclipse mythology compared to local beliefs. The Islamic theological view is that eclipses are evidences of God's omnipotence through natural signs, and are not related to a person's death or birth. Islam encourages Muslims to intensify their praises to God during eclipses to acknowledge his greatness. Islam strictly opposes the belief that eclipses occur because of *Batara Kala*, or other reasons, because only God can regulate nature and give signs of his greatness. Islam actually instructs its adherents to pray during an eclipse. In this regard, this article examines the relationship between religion, tradition and identity as seen from the myth about eclipses in a village in Central Java.

Literature review: *Myth of eclipse in Islamic and Javanese perspectives*

According to Leeming (2005), a myth is defined as a genre of folklore containing a cultural or historical narrative of a society. According to the Indonesia Dictionary (*Tim Penyusun Kamus Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa*), a myth is a story of a nation about ancient gods and heroes, which contains an interpretation of the origin of the

universe, humans and the nation itself, containing a profound meaning expressed in unseen ways (Penyusun 1999:660). According to Partanto and Al-Barry (2001:475), myths are defined as those related to primitive beliefs about unseen natural life that arise from human efforts, unscientific and not based on real experience to explain the world or nature around them. Usually, myths are followed by both awe and fear which gave rise to a cult of worship and adoration. This worship is then preserved in the form of religious ceremonies which are held periodically at certain times. Some are in the form of speech conveyed from mouth to mouth throughout the ages, from generation to generation which are now recognised as folk tales (Syaufi et al. 2021).

As a natural phenomenon that is closely related to supernatural elements, eclipse mythology has appeared in various religions and local beliefs. The Indonesia Dictionary defines eclipse as the obscuring of the moon or planets caused by the sunlight blocked by the earth or the total or partial darkness of the sun or the moon unnaturally seen from the earth (Kamisa 2013). In an Indonesian Standard Dictionary, lunar or solar eclipse is defined as partially or completely dark conditions of the two objects when observed from the earth. Lunar eclipses occur when the moonlight does not reach the earth's surface because the geometric center of the moon, the earth and the sun lies on one line and the earth is at the center. While the sun is in the state of eclipse, the moon is in the middle of the distance between the earth and the sun, so that the moon's shadow falls on the earth's surface (Kasim 2018).

Rituals for eclipses are also prescribed in various religious teachings. In Islam, there are two different words for eclipse. Eclipse in Arabic is called *kusuf* or *khusuf*. These two words can be used to describe both the solar eclipse and lunar eclipse. However, the word *kusuf* more specifically denotes solar eclipse (*kusuf al-syams*) and the word *khusuf* refers to the lunar eclipse (*khusuf al-qamar*). The word *Kusuf* in Arabic means covering, while *khusuf* means entering (Syarif 2016:522). *Khusuf* means covering, which is etymologically taken from the natural phenomenon when the moon covers the sun which causes a solar eclipse. *Khusuf* means entering, that is, the natural phenomenon that the moon enters the shadow of the earth, creating a lunar eclipse. In astronomy, an eclipse is described as obscuring the observer's view of a celestial body by another celestial body that is closer to the observer.

In Islam, an eclipse is an ordinary natural event and not related to any myth or belief. In accordance with the hadith of the Prophet, narrated by al-Mughīra ibn Shu'ba, the Prophet said: 'The sun eclipsed in the lifetime of Allah's Messenger on the day when the Prophet Ibrahim died. So, the people said that the sun had eclipsed because of the death of Ibrahim.' The Prophet said, 'The sun and the moon do not eclipse because of the death or life (i.e. birth) of someone. When you see the eclipse pray and invoke Allah'.

In Islam, the eclipse is used as a medium of worship, such as holding eclipse prayers in congregation in the mosque. In historical studies, at the time of Prophet Muhammad, there had been a solar eclipse which was narrated in several authentic hadiths. However, these hadiths do not specify the exact time and occurrence of the eclipse. This is possible because the Prophet emphasised more on the aspects of worship guidance that need to be carried out when an eclipse occurs.

Regarding the eclipse, Islam prescribes several things. In the Quranic sura of Fushilat verse 37, it is stated that 'Among His Signs are the Night and the Day, and the Sun and the Moon. Do not prostrate to the sun and the moon, but prostrate to Allah, who created them, if it is Him ye wish to serve'. In a hadith from Abi Bakrah, as narrated by Bukhari, Prophet Muhammad said, 'The sun and the moon do not eclipse because of someone's death. So, whenever you see these eclipses pray and invoke (Allah) till the eclipse is over'.

During an eclipse, a Muslim is encouraged to perform multiple prayers. Prophet Muhammad encouraged his followers to multiply prayers during an eclipse. There is no specific prayer for this eclipse event, but some scholars recommend reading a prayer such as:

Praise be to Allah, pure praise, good and blessed by Him, who fills the heavens and fills the earth and fills what's between them and fills whatever you want. (He) has the right to call servants and we are all servants.¹

Various hadiths and prayers suggested during solar eclipses (*kusuf al-shams*) and lunar eclipses (*khusuf al-qamar*) demonstrate Islam's theological position regarding natural signs as evidences of God's majesty. Islam forbids the view that eclipses are caused by creatures or gods, as it is against the principles of Islamic monotheism. In addition, Islam encourages Muslims to stay away from myths about eclipses, and fight shirk (idolatry or polytheism) in interpreting natural phenomena. Islam forbids people to associate eclipses and any natural events with the arrival of disaster or death, because it can lead to shirk [idolatry or polytheism].

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research that focuses on field research that is oriented towards ethnographic studies. The research approach is descriptive analytic, which is a research that aims to provide an overview of the eclipse mythology in the perspective of local culture and Islamic theology. The sources of data in this study are divided into two, namely, primary data and secondary data. Primary data were collected from primary sources by means of interviews with informants, observations and surveys of research sites in Banjarsari, Kradenan, Grobogan, Central Java. The secondary data are in the form of books, papers and articles that are relevant to the research problems regarding religious theology, cultural traditions and Javanese Muslim identity.

1. See <https://www.dorar.net/feqhia/956>.

After the required data are collected, they are processed and analysed along with the presentation process using qualitative methods, with transcripts, coding and analysis.

The theoretical analysis used to describe and analyse eclipse mythology in cultural rites and Islamic theological perspective is to use a conceptual approach from Segal (1980) which investigates religious theories, myths and ritualistic elements to demonstrate religious observance. Furthermore, this research uses the theoretical foundation of Kidd and Teagle (2012), which conceptualises culture and identity. This theoretical foundation is used to emphasise the close relationship between culture and identity and to analyse the expression of identity through culture that aims to figure out 'us' and 'them'. This study focuses on folk as a cultural ritual that refers to the culture of ordinary people. In this case, the Javanese people's belief in the myth of lunar and solar eclipses is examined in relation to myths as a medium to maintain the existence and identity of a community group, namely rural Javanese Muslims in Banjarsari. By using the sociological analysis of religion, the analysis tries to qualitatively formulate the extent to which people's beliefs can be a medium in maintaining their cultural identity and theological dimensions of religion.

The overview of the research site

Geographically, Grobogan regency is the second largest district in Central Java. Its geographic location is 110°32' – 111°15' east longitude and 6° 55' – 7° 16' south latitude, with a distance span ± 37 km from north to south and ± 83 km from east to west (Statistics of Grobogan 2017:44). Grobogan is bordered by Demak, Kudus, Pati and Blora regencies in the north; Blora Regency in the east; Semarang, Boyolali, Sragen and Ngawi regencies in the south; and Semarang and Demak regencies in the west (Ernawati 2013). Administratively, Grobogan regency is divided into six regent assistant areas and 19 subdistricts. It consists of 280 villages, 1461 hamlets, 1551 community associations (*Rukun Warga*) and 7269 neighbourhoods (*Rukun Tetangga*). Its area is 197586420 ha (1975.864 km²) in the form of lowlands, highlands and hills with sloping and steep mountains. From the Statistics Indonesia (*Badan Pusat Statistik*), the population of Grobogan reached 1351429 people in 2015, and most of the population is Muslim, which is 98.86% of the population (Statistics of Grobogan 2017:44). The districts in Grobogan regency can be seen in Table 1.

Kradenan district, one of the districts in Grobogan regency, is in a hilly area at an altitude of 50 m – 100 m above sea level with a slope of 8° – 15°. It is in eastern Purwodadi, the capital of the regency. The distance between Purwodadi and Kradenan is approximately 27 km to the east. Administratively, Kradenan district consists of 14 villages. According to Statistics Indonesia, the population of Kradenan district reached 84.159 people in 2020, accounted for 5.67% from Grobogan total population. As most residents are farmers, the local government established an

TABLE 1: The districts in Grobogan regency.

| No. | District | No. | District |
|-----|--------------|-----|---------------|
| 1. | Kedungjati | 11. | Tawangharjo |
| 2. | Karangrayung | 12. | Grobogan |
| 3. | Penawangan | 13. | Purwodadi |
| 4. | Toroh | 14. | Brati |
| 5. | Genyer | 15. | Klambu |
| 6. | Pulokulon | 16. | Godong |
| 7. | Kradenan | 17. | Gubug |
| 8. | Gabus | 18. | Tegowanu |
| 9. | Ngaringan | 19. | Tanggungharjo |
| 10. | Wirosari | | |

Source: Statistics Indonesia of Grobogan Regency 2020.

integrated crop management field school as an effort to increase the productivity of agricultural crops (Statistics of Grobogan 2018). Demographically, the majority of Kradenan's population are Muslims, accounting for more than 99% of the population. In terms of religious status, the demographic profile of Kradenan's population is shown in Table 2.

Eclipse myth and cultural tradition of Banjarsari

In Banjarsari, an eclipse is still seen closely related to the myth that develops in the society. The villagers believe that the eclipse occurs because a giant called *buto* named Batara Kala was trying to swallow up the sun or the moon. They believe that the eclipse can be disastrous for pregnant women and farm animals, and in order to prevent this disaster they must perform certain ceremonies or rituals (Haristiani et al. 2017). If the villagers do not perform the rituals, the fetus will disappear. The villagers have a tradition of waking pregnant women, and pregnant farm animals or laying chicken, during eclipse. There is a belief that can be said to be mystical when the villagers do not perform this habit that has been passed down from generation to generation by their ancestors (Keeler 1988). This tradition is usually performed by waking the farm animals such as a pregnant cow or goat, and then rubbing their stomach using *awu layan* while saying '*le/nduk seng neng jero... tangi-tangi... enek gerhana... tangi-tangi...*' ['Hey, son/daughter who is inside the house ... wake up ... there is an eclipse ... wake up']. *Awu layan* is ash that comes from burning firewood, because the villagers still use firewood as the main fuel for cooking. Thus, it is not difficult to find *awu layan* in the village.

If cows and goats are awakened by rubbing their stomachs, the method for waking the chickens laying eggs or incubating the eggs is slightly different. A chicken incubates her eggs for 21 days. During this time, if an eclipse occurs, the chicken is awakened, and the eggs are sprinkled with *awu layan*. This ritual aims to allow the chicken eggs to hatch.

The Banjarsari villagers believe that if this tradition is not performed, the fetus in the farm animal's womb or chicken eggs whose mother is not awakened will perish. The villagers believe that a few weeks after the eclipse the cow fetus can

TABLE 2: Religious status of Kradenan.

| Religion | Freq | | Total | Percentage |
|--------------|--------|--------|--------|------------|
| | Male | Female | | |
| Islam | 42.045 | 41.504 | 83.549 | 99.28 |
| Catholic | 26 | 34 | 60 | 0.07 |
| Protestant | 248 | 263 | 511 | 0.61 |
| Hinduism | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Budhism | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Confucianism | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Local belief | 17 | 21 | 38 | 0.05 |

Source: Disdukcapil (Department of Population and Civil Registration, Grobogan), 2020, *Laporan Jumlah Penduduk Berdasarkan Agama per Kecamatan*, viewed from https://ppid.disdukcapil.grobogan.go.id/informasi/file/19_jumlah_penduduk_agama_kec_2020_sm2.pdf

TABLE 3: Interviewees.

| No. | Name | Age (Years) |
|-----|----------|-------------|
| 1. | Partono | 50 |
| 2. | Yatmini | 45 |
| 3. | Warsini | 65 |
| 4. | Lasiyem | 60 |
| 5. | Kustam | 35 |
| 6. | Suratmin | 65 |
| 7. | Taufan | 34 |

disappear and the chicken eggs fail to hatch. This belief also applies to humans. If during an eclipse a pregnant woman is not awakened or does not follow the traditions that exist in that society, then the baby in her womb will die. To prevent this from happening, a pregnant mother wakes her baby by rubbing her stomach using *bobok* potion. This *bobok* is often used by the villagers for traditional activities, such as when someone dies, their hand is rubbed with this mixture, and there are many other traditional activities that use this *bobok* potion.

There is some outline information that the writer gets about various myths and traditional activities performed by the people of Banjarsari in responding to the eclipse phenomenon based on some interviews (Table 3).

Partono (50 years old, villager) shared his experience during the lunar eclipse on 17 July 2019. He forgot to wake up his chickens, which were incubating their eggs, and therefore the eggs that were being incubated did not hatch. He believed that all the chicken eggs that did not hatch were because of a lunar eclipse that occurred at that time.

Yatmini (45 years old, housewife and farmer) has a farm animal, namely, a cow. During the lunar eclipse on 17 July 2019, her cow was pregnant for 7 months. Several weeks after the lunar eclipse, it was realised that the baby in the cow's womb had perished.

Warsini (65 years old, a farmer and duck breeder) is aware of the myths related to a lunar eclipse. According to her, those myths have been taught from generation to generation by her ancestors. However, on 17 July 2019, when all the duck eggs in her farm did not hatch during the lunar eclipse, called *kopyor* [a soft translucent jelly-like flesh coconut] in Javanese, Warsini did not ascribe the incident to the eclipse. She preferred to accept what had happened and did not believe in the superstition of the eclipse myth.

Lasiyem (60 years old, a farmer and cattle breeder) believes that the myth of a lunar eclipse has been passed down to her from her ancestors. When a lunar eclipse occurred on 17 July 2020, her cow was pregnant. But suddenly the cow did not give birth and the cow's stomach was deflated, even though before that the cow's stomach was big just like a pregnant cow, and the cow was able to produce milk. But now it does not produce milk anymore, and even at that time her cow produced blood from its teats instead of milk.

Kustam (35 years old, a farmer in Grobogan) often heard the myth of a lunar eclipse in his community, but never experienced the incident by himself. Kustam does not believe in the myth of an eclipse. According to him, if a myth is believed it might happen. Furthermore, Kustam said that the myth, according to the Javanese, aims to inform when an eclipse occurs, and is asked to be careful. Over time, people have their own interpretation of a lunar eclipse so that it becomes a belief. If explored, belief in these myths can contradict religion and can be called shirk, but if you only wake up cows it does not lead to shirk, because the intention is only to be careful in case of an eclipse.

Suratmin (65 years old, villager) is a farmer who often uses *primbon* in interpreting an event, including when an eclipse occurs, because according to him, the prediction in the *primbon* had many truths. Suratmin as a farmer also has several cows in his house. When asked about the eclipse myth, Suratmin told that he believed it but did not take it seriously. He also experienced the same incidents as other people; his calf was lost.

The eclipse and its village tradition

Based on the interview with the seven informants, several important points can be taken regarding the myth of the eclipse and societal activities in Banjarsari village. They are as follows:

Hiding in the house and even hiding under the bed (Warsini 2020)

When an eclipse occurs, especially a solar eclipse, people in ancient times and now are still afraid. In fact, people in ancient times asked their children to stay inside the house. All the doors and windows of the house were closed tightly because they were afraid that the light of the solar eclipse would enter the house and they thought that sunlight would make them blind.

Waking up the pregnant farm animals (Yatmini 2020)

When an eclipse occurs, whether it is a solar or lunar eclipse, people wake up their pregnant farm animals such as cows and rub their stomachs with *awu layan*. According to the belief in this village, if the tradition is not performed, the baby in the cow's stomach will be lost by the eclipse. The ancient people also woke up their fruitful plants such as coconuts so that they would not be eaten by the eclipse.

They thought the coconuts was empty because the tree was not awakened and sprinkled with *awu layan* during the eclipse.

Sprinkling egg with *awu layan* (Partono 2020)

The chicken incubates its eggs for 21 days until the eggs hatch. If there are chickens laying and incubating their eggs when an eclipse occurs, specifically a solar eclipse, some people in Banjarsari village wake up their chickens and sprinkle them with *awu layan*, otherwise their eggs will not hatch, and people in Banjarsari called it *kopyor*.

Prohibiting pregnant women from leaving the house

Pregnant women who know that there will be an eclipse are prohibited to leave the house. They must hide under the bed during the eclipse. They must also wake their baby in their stomach by rubbing their stomachs and tell the baby that an eclipse is occurring. The women usually make *bobok* potion or cool powder to apply to their stomach. This potion gives a cool sensation in the stomach of the pregnant women and rejects the negative aura of the eclipse.

Praying for the eclipse

When an eclipse occurs, the villagers are urged by the village elders to recite the eclipse prayer (*solatul khusuf*) in congregation at the nearest mosque from their house. This shows that the villagers continue to perform religious orders.

Cultural myth as a medium of tradition and identity

From the results of research on the myths related to eclipses in Banjarsari village, it is clear that the people in the village still strongly hold on to their ancestors' cultural heritage regarding the causal relationship between the eclipse phenomenon and the occurrence of calamities such as the loss of a baby in the womb of pregnant women or pregnant cows and the rotten chicken eggs or *kopyor*.

Scientifically, the eclipse phenomenon has no connection with the loss of a baby in the womb or a rotten chicken egg. The following are scientific facts related to the eclipse phenomenon:

The effect of eclipse on the human eye

The effect of a solar eclipse on the human eye or vision can be damaging. According to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, when a person looks directly at the sun during a solar eclipse, even though only for a few seconds, it can cause serious damage to the eye. In serious circumstances, vision can be blurred or shadowed. It decreases the ability of the eye to detect colours and shapes, causes a black spot in the middle of the eye and ultimately leads to permanent eye damage (Alodokter 2018; Cafasso 2017; Smith 2017).

According to Mujab (2014), the waves of solar radiation reaching the earth's surface range from ultraviolet (UV) (more than 290 nm) to radio waves. On the other hand, the ability of the eye tissues to receive sunlight is in the 380 nm – 1400 nm range. When the eye receives UV radiation, it will accelerate ageing in the outer layer of the eye. This is what will cause cataracts. If the light reaches the eye, it will cause damage to the eye's stem and cone cells, which are known as light-sensitive cells. This is what triggers the appearance of complex chemical reactions in the cells of the eye and can damage them. In extreme cases, it can blind the eyes. One of the impacts caused by the eye damage is decreased vision or loss of vision functions, either temporarily or permanently (depending on the level of eye damage) (Mujab 2014:94).

So, the conclusion is that people who are afraid of being exposed to sunlight when a solar eclipse occurs, because they think it is dangerous, are considered correct based on the research and health experts. However, the current society in Banjarsari village, Kradenan district, Grobogan regency has been able to respond wisely, and they do not need to be afraid and hide under the bed.

The effect of eclipse on cow pregnancy

According to energy healing practitioner Dr Mukhlas Yasi Alamsyah, eclipses, especially solar eclipses, do not really affect the behaviour of large animals, such as cows and others. However, if a total solar eclipse occurs, it will have a significant effect. He stated that crossbreeding cows are much affected by the energy changes that come from the geopathic of the earth.

Geopathic, according to the veterinarian supervisor of PT Eka Farma Semarang, is energy that emerges from within the earth which is gushed upwards through the cracks of the earth's plates or fractures. Usually, it has a bad effect on cows, such as if there is geopathic under the pregnant cow, it will affect the foetus or the baby, causing physical disability and others. So, the effect of the eclipse is only on the comfort of the cows (Suara Merdeka 2020).

The effect on the growth of chicken embryos

According to Mujab (2014), the principle of hatching in an artificial egg incubator is to maintain the temperature and humidity of the air in the drip machine room to match the temperature and humidity required at the stages of growth of the embryo. When a total solar eclipse occurs, the temperature and the air pressure suddenly change. It affects the humidity and the life of the embryo, and thus the success rates for hatching eggs will decrease (Mujab 2014:95).

The effect of the eclipse on women's pregnancies

European Space Agency (2004) defines solar eclipse as a natural phenomenon in which the position of the moon is between the sun and the earth. The sunlight that should have

fallen on the Earth's surface was blocked by the Moon. The phenomenon of the eclipse is not dangerous; it is something special and beautiful. Thomas Djamaluddin, head of the National Institute of Aeronautics and Space (LAPAN/*Lembaga Penerbangan dan Antariksa Nasional*), emphasised that there is no connection between the eclipse and pregnant women or the sun's harmful rays during the eclipse. A solar eclipse does not emit radiation that differs from the radiation present in the Sun. In a total solar eclipse, solar radiation is covered by the moon and is not harmful to the mother's pregnancy at all (Muslimah 2016).

The influence of the growth of the eclipse myth on people's livelihood

According to Statistics Indonesia, Grobogan is one of the largest rice-producing regencies in Java province. Most people (52.5%) are food crop farmers. Likewise, most villagers in Banjarsari work as food crop farmers. As farmers, people usually have a job or extra income by raising farm animals. On average, the villagers have farm animals, both goats and cows. The people raise cows or goats and use their dung as fertiliser in the fields. They also utilise unused crop residues such as straw as cow food so that they are not wasted. In this village, there are still a lot of empty land and many wild plants and grass to be used as animal feed. In Banjarsari, almost every house has kampung chicken and still many other farm animals such as goats and ducks.

The eclipse myth is closely related to the livestock belonging to the villagers, most of whom work as farmers and livestock breeders on a household scale by raising cows, goats and chickens. If there are many people in a society that raise cows and other animals but they lack insight and are still primitive people, then the myth will still exist and even grow. These are some of the traditions of the Banjarsari village society, Kradenan district, Grobogan regency in responding to the eclipse. According to the author's opinion, there may still be some other activities that have not been mentioned in this article because of the lack of sources of information and other written references.

However, the villagers still maintain this tradition because they believe that if the tradition is abandoned, something bad will happen. This means that in this case the belief in the myth of the eclipse has a role to maintain the identity of a social group or community. The rapid development of the internet, information technology and globalisation have affected the sustainability of local culture and traditional practices. All aspects of life seem to be forced to comply with global standards, from goods and services to lifestyle. This practice, consciously or not, can erode the identity and existence of local communities along with their local culture or traditions. Globalisation tends to conflict with cultural identity. Cultural identity implies 'belonging' individuals into cultural groups or communities, while globalisation implies unity or universality. Therefore, through the traditions and beliefs they maintain, they can still be recognised. This is closely related to the identity of the Banjarsari villagers.

Cultural identity is conceptualised as the specific characteristics used by a social group to distinguish their culture from that of other groups (Ennaji 2005). This concept refers to the understanding and insight of who they are, and what is most important about them. Important sources of identity appear to include nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class. Even though it is the individual who has the identity, this concept also relates to the social group in which the individual is a part and becomes the basis of reference for his identification. The thing to remember is that there is not always a perfect match between how a person thinks about himself or herself and how his or her image is in other people's mind. The concept of identity is closely related to cultural ideas. Identity can be formed through culture or subculture.

To maintain their beliefs and traditions regarding the eclipse myth, the Banjarsari people spontaneously and consciously perform these rites every time when an eclipse occurs. These rites serve as a way in which the Banjarsari people show their identity. The form of special activities or rituals performed by the Banjarsari villagers is one of the inherent characteristics of their identities (Baker 2005). Woodward (2010) stated that the identity is more of a discursive construction, a product of discourses, or regulated ways of speaking about the world. Identity is a discursive construction because it is through narrative that a person can be recognised and can show their identity, they will be known and can show themselves in the ways they talk about the world; by maintaining the traditions and culture they have. In other words, identity is created but not found. The results showed that a myth is a cultural or theological construction as a transcendental-oriented order to legitimise human actions. Myths in relation to local religions and beliefs play an important role not only because they contain miraculous events regarding supernatural beings or phenomena, but because they have an existential function for humans. With myths, people have faith in certain things that are sacred and they perform religious ceremonial acts as a form and expression of their beliefs.

The results of this study reveal that there are different interpretations of eclipses in Javanese culture and Islamic theology. The residents of Banjarsari village in this study believe that there is a relationship between eclipses and calamities, such as death or disaster. On the other hand, they as Muslims perform eclipse prayers in the mosque. This shows a syncretic form of compromise between local culture and the theological conception of Islam. From this study, it is concluded that both local culture and Islam encourage adherents to hold rituals during eclipses. This is consistent with the findings of Segal (1980) who claims ritual relations in the myth of belief. From this study it was found that Islam commands prayer and worship of God during eclipses to strengthen faith, stay away from myths and superstitions, and praise God's omnipotence that controls nature. Meanwhile, adherents of local culture hold rituals to distance themselves from the perceived consequences of the myths they believe in.

Furthermore, the villagers carry out cultural ceremonies during the eclipse to strengthen their identity as Javanese people, with the mythical culture of the eclipse being passed down from generation to generation. This shows that the eclipse event is one of the reinforcements for the identity of local traditions. In turn, this can distinguish between Javanese Muslim groups and devout Muslims in interpreting eclipses. Javanese Islam adherents tend to feel the need to carry out cultural traditions, while continuing to perform Islamic ritualistic prayers during the eclipse. On the other hand, devout Muslims only focus on avoiding syncretic practices contained in cultural myths. This is in accordance with Kidd and Teagle (2012), and Ennaji (2005) who affirmed that cultural traditions can be useful as a distinguishing character between one group and another. Susilo and Syato (2016) explained that the epistemological conception of Javanese culture is strongly coloured by Hindu cosmology which is harmonised with Islamic theological teachings of monotheism. This shows that local cultural practices are meaningful in social beings to strengthen identity, and are not rigidly understood as theologically syncretic (Mulder 1983).

In the context of ethnographic sociology, the practice of this village community is in accordance with Woodward's (1988) opinion in elaborating Javanese Islamic principles. According to Woodward (1988), in a 'slametan', which is a practice of gathering relatives and community together to celebrate an occasion in Javanese society, Javanese Muslim groups tend to observe cultural rituals by adopting Hindu heritage, such as tumpeng (mountain-shaped rice), and offerings. These practices are carried out on certain days which are not explicitly regulated in Islam. However, while observing the *slametan*, they perform the ritual through reciting Quranic verses and praying in an Islamic way. This shows that the harmonisation carried out by the Javanese Islamic community is to combine ancestral cultural rituals with typical Islamic ritual worship. This is considered theologically not contradictory because it has no overlapping beliefs, and they still hold onto and believe in Allah as a single God.

Conclusion

Based on ethnographic studies, the findings of this study provide an overview of eclipse mythology of the local Javanese community in Banjarsari village and analyse it from identity theory. The villagers believe that the eclipse occurs because of an evil giant called a *buto* or Batara Kala who tries to devour the sun or the moon. This is the influence of Hindu cosmology on Javanese Islam which is continuously maintained by the village community. In general, the cultural rituals related to the eclipse myth that are performed by the Banjarsari villagers are a reflection of grassroots culture in interpreting natural phenomena and harmonising their theological beliefs.

The results show that the villagers maintain and preserve this belief as a medium to maintain the existence of their identity. Theoretically, this is related to folk as a cultural ritual

of ordinary people or society which mostly comes from self-created and autonomous grassroots, which is then used directly as the basis of ritual or belief. This in turn gives rise to private and public experiences, which serve as the basis for the formation of cultural identity. In addition, the eclipse is believed to bring disaster to pregnant women and livestock. This shows that the villagers tend to interpret the eclipse as a bad omen. Although conceptually, this view seems theologically contradictory to Islam, which encourages people to stay away from superstition and myths in eclipse events, customary practices that are carried out solely for the defence of Javanese Islamic identity.

To prevent the perceived supernatural threat, they must perform certain ceremonies or rituals. Their rituals focus on traditional practices such as hiding inside the house and even hiding under the bed, waking up pregnant farm animals, sprinkling eggs with *awu layan* and prohibiting pregnant women from leaving the house. In general, these practices are quite simple and do not indicate any theological elements that are contrary to Islam. On the other hand, they recite Islamic ritualistic prayers in the mosques to remember God's omnipotence, ask for forgiveness and protection and express gratitude to God for his favours. The mystical rituals and traditions performed by the villagers during the eclipse are used to maintain their identity. They compromise of Hindu cosmology and traditional practices with theological conceptions and rituals peculiar to Islam.

The limitation of this study is that it does not identify the level of religious knowledge of the village community. As an ethnographic study, this research only focuses on how cultural beliefs are maintained and interpreted in a society, by examining their intersection with theological conceptions. In this context, this research only focuses on how the cultural myths in Banjarsari intersect with the theological conception of Islam. This uniquely confirms the scientific investigation of the relationship of cultural ritualistic practice and theological dimensions as forming a distinctive identity for a group. Furthermore, this study does not investigate why the superstitious culture is still maintained in this village community, and whether it is related to the lack of religious education and disengagement of Muslim authorities in dealing with this phenomenon. Future research is needed to further investigate the level of religious knowledge with superstitious beliefs and the preservation of indigenous cultures. Moreover, further research can explore the involvement of religious authorities with customary practices regarding the eclipse myth.

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Authors' contributions

A.I. conceptualised the article and wrote the original draft. A.I., M.A.I., A.I. and M.M. contributed to formal analysis, investigation, review and editing, validation of results, and data curation.

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Data availability

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