

## The Value Of Sufism in the Cuci Mori Tradition of The PSHT Pragaan Branch: An Interpretive Anthropological Review Clifford Geertz

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### Abstract

*This study examines the ritual of washing the mori (ceremonial cloth) practiced by the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) Pragaan Branch during the month of Suro, focusing on its stages and symbolic meanings. Using in-depth observation and interviews with PSHT elders and members, the study identifies three ritual stages: preparation of ritual materials, washing the mori with water from seven springs and setaman flowers, and a closing communal prayer. Each stage symbolizes spiritual renewal, inner purification, and moral discipline. Drawing on Clifford Geertz's anthropological perspective, the ritual is interpreted as a system of symbols reflecting Javanese-Islamic cultural knowledge. Thick description shows that the ritual functions not only as an annual tradition but also as a means of identity formation, reinforcing brotherhood, moral values, and the continuity of the organization's cultural and religious ethos.*

**Keywords:** *Sufism, Tradition, Anthropology*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the cultural traditions that originated in Indonesia is pencak silat. Pencak silat is a martial art rich in philosophical, spiritual, and mystical significance. It is practiced by various ethnic groups across Indonesia. Each form of pencak silat embodies noble values that serve as a guide for proper conduct (Afrilia, et al. Ratih Baiduri et al., 2025a). The Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate, commonly known as PSHT or SH Terate, is a traditional martial art originating from Indonesia that was founded in 1922 by Ki Hajar Harjo Utomo. In addition to being a martial art, SH Terate instills ethical values, a philosophy of life, and supernatural beliefs to shape specific behaviors and actions known as rituals. Such rites are manifested in religious ceremonies consisting of a series of formulas and movements that have been agreed upon by the group of participants (Fauzan 2012).

In the anthropology of religion, rituals are also referred to as religious ceremonies that play a vital role in the existence and preservation of a faith. One such ritual that has evolved and continues to be performed by members of SH Terate is the cuci mori ritual, held every Suro month (Muharram). This ritual is performed by members who have been officially accepted into the extended family (community) at least one year after their initial induction as new members. The activity involves washing a shroud using water from seven sources and a bouquet of seven different types of flowers. For members of SH Terate, the



cuci mori ritual carries specific symbolism that requires a more detailed explanation to be fully understood.

The practice of the SH Terate cuci mori ritual is worth studying because, overall, it reflects patterns of diversity within Javanese society commonly known as syncretic Islam which refers to a form of Islamic diversity influenced by pre-Islamic beliefs, including animism, dynamism, and Hindu-Buddhist traditions, that existed before Islam arrived in Java. In Clifford Geertz's view, this type of diversity is referred to as "Islam abangan." (Geertz 1960, p. 5) that is, a form of religiosity that blends Islamic values with local culture.

In the study of Nusantara Islam, however, local rituals cannot be understood merely as marginal religious practices, but rather as a primary expression of how Muslim communities in the Nusantara region have internalized Islamic teachings into their everyday cultural experiences. Nusantara Islam developed not through a rejection of local culture, but through a long process of synthesis between normative Islamic values and the cosmology of local cultures (Muhammad Rafi'i 2019b). Therefore, rituals such as cuci mori in the tradition of the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) should be understood as a living expression of Islam, not as a deviation from religious teachings.

The cuci mori ritual serves as an annual symbolic activity, as well as a spiritual medium that shapes the moral consciousness and religious identity of PSHT members. This ritual provides a space where Sufi teachings, Javanese ethics, and the value of brotherhood, institutionalized within an organization, converge. This aligns with the perspective of the anthropology of religion, which emphasizes that religion is not merely confined to normative texts but also finds its value in the rituals, symbols, and daily practices of its adherents.

Unfortunately, some discourses on religious purification view local rituals through a dichotomous lens that pits "pure Islam" against "cultural traditions," thereby placing practices such as cuci mori in a problematic position. In fact, when examined through a symbolic anthropological approach, such rituals demonstrate how Islamic values are deeply and contextually internalized. Thus, this study is important from a descriptive perspective and contributes to the enrichment of Nusantara Islam by offering a more comprehensive symbolic interpretation of PSHT rituals.

Previous research has been extensively conducted on the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate, as described by (Fauzan 2012) which highlights the symbolism of the initiation of new PSHT members, a form of religious expression among the Javanese community within the organization. The initiation ritual embodies profound spiritual values; each element of the ritual such as prayers, symbols, and physical activities holds a special meaning related to character building and the strengthening of fraternal bonds (Afrilia et al. Ratih Baiduri et al., 2025a). Meanwhile, other research focuses on the physical aspects of a PSHT member who is able to shape and articulate an identity that subsequently spreads and evolves within the Jember context (Ilma and Hery Prasetyo, 2017). However, the teachings of SH Terate emphasize not only martial arts that prioritize physical strength, but also the practice of Sufism within SH Terate pencak silat and how members apply Islamic teachings and

philosophy. Sufism in PSHT involves mastering control of the heart or mind, demonstrating good behavior, promoting religious moderation, and exploring the meaning of life to cultivate spiritual intelligence (Sutoyo 2023). Through its teachings, which are applied in daily life, PSHT martial arts trains members to become more independent and to develop themselves so they can be of service to others, while encouraging students to obey His commands and avoid what He has forbidden (Tri Alfi Nur Fikri 2021b). Each individual has a different perspective on the boundaries between students and staff, which are in place to ensure that students do not act recklessly toward their coaches and behave politely, with the aim of fostering a strong sense of camaraderie (Nanda Saiful Anam 2017). The values instilled in PSHT's teachings include honesty, responsibility, courtesy, compassion, tolerance, maturity, and wisdom. This process of instilling these values is carried out systematically through physical training integrated with mental and spiritual development, thereby fostering members who are physically and spiritually resilient (Mala Aulia Wulan et al. Abdurrahman Wahid et al., 2025c). Spiritual education begins at an early age. Given the decline in moral values among teenagers, character education should be instilled before they enter adolescence. Therefore, SH Terate strives to provide Islamic spiritual education to shape the character of teenagers (Sugiantoro and Abdul Ghofur, 2025). The same applies to research (Rongky Y Famdale et al., 2025d) which examines the role of the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate organization in fostering character development among adolescents in Maktihan Village. This study describes the behavior of adolescents before joining SH Terate, noting that they frequently caused disturbances, consumed alcohol, and exhibited anarchic, defiant behavior in response to every issue.

In the Javanese context, the SH Terate *cuci mori* tradition bears similarities to the *jamasan pusaka* tradition, which is commonly practiced during the month of Suro, as discussed by (Leariska Arisky and Agus M. Fauzi, 2024). Both emphasize the process of purifying objects considered to have historical and spiritual value, and are rooted in the belief that the month of Suro is the ideal time for spiritual renewal. The difference lies in the fact that the ritual cleansing of heirlooms focuses on the preservation of royal court artifacts or family heirlooms, whereas the “*cuci mori*” ritual is performed on symbols of membership in SH Terate. This comparison demonstrates that SH Terate adopts a Javanese value framework but assigns it a more collective social function: strengthening the identity of brotherhood.

In addition to *jamasan*, the practice of purifying water from seven sources in the *cuci mori* tradition shares similarities with the use of water in purification rituals across various communities in the Indonesian archipelago, such as the purification processions in *selamatan* ceremonies or the practice of bathing sacred objects in certain regions of Java and Madura. Research (Lily Yulia Surya Sari et al. 2019a) This indicates that the use of seven types of flowers in the *Jamasan* ritual at the Yogyakarta Palace reflects a cosmological view of the harmonization of nature and humanity. This parallels the use of seven types of flowers in the *Cuci Mori* ceremony, which is also interpreted as the unification of spiritual and emotional elements.

When examined comparatively, the SH Terate tradition also shows similarities to purification rituals in local Islamic traditions, such as the Jam'iyah Ruqyah Aswaja or the recitation of specific prayers aimed at strengthening spirituality and self-discipline. These common characteristics are evident in the emphasis on the values of purity, introspection, and self-control, as mentioned in the findings of this study. Furthermore, the value of purification symbolized by water also resonates with the tradition of baptism in the Abrahamic religions mentioned (Metin Akiz 2016b) in his study of the symbolism of the number seven. This means that the motif of purification through water is a universal concept found in various rituals across religions and cultures.

By presenting this comparison, it becomes clear that the *cuci mori* ritual is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather part of a network of purification traditions that have long existed in Java and various other cultures. This comparison reinforces the argument that the symbolism in PSHT does not stem solely from internal teachings, but rather constitutes a dynamic cultural dialogue between Islamic values, Javanese traditions, and local cosmology.

Most of the articles above discuss PSHT rituals in general, such as initiation, *selamatan*, and acculturation. However, previous research has not made *cuci mori* the primary focus, particularly in analyzing it as a symbolic representation of purity and spiritual transition. Yet, *cuci mori* serves as a symbol of purifying the heart from impure traits and all that defiles the heart, so that one may enter the new Hijri year with a clean soul and a pure intention to face the Divine Lord.

The first objective of this study is to describe the form and stages of the PSHT Pragaan Branch's *cuci mori* ritual during the month of Suro. Second, to analyze the symbolic meanings within the *cuci mori* ritual, such as the shroud, water from seven sources, bouquets of seven types of flowers, and the timing of the ritual. Third, to analyze the symbolic meanings through Clifford Geertz's thick description perspective to understand the relationship between symbolism and the spiritual values of PSHT.

In light of the various academic discussions above, this paper will address the three main issues mentioned: first, the model and stages of the *cuci mori* ritual within the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate in the Pragaan Branch during the month of Suro; second, the symbolic meaning of the *cuci mori* ritual; Third, what is the meaning of the *cuci mori* ritual from the anthropological perspective of Clifford Geertz? These three main issues aim to elucidate the symbolic meaning embedded in this ritual. This research is based on the researcher's observations during their tenure as a member of SH Terate, from 2019 to 2025.

## 2. METHODS

The approach used in this study is qualitative descriptive, aiming to offer a perspective that explains the symbolic meaning of the PSHT Pragaan Branch's *cuci mori* ritual, which was methodologically examined during the month of Suro. This study focuses on the study of phenomena, including rituals, customs, and behaviors that reflect syncretism in Javanese society, which is closely intertwined with the values of Nusantara Islam. In an area that still actively practices SH Terate customs, the research was conducted at the

Pragaan Branch headquarters, Semenep Branch, East Java. The subjects of this study include: first, SH Terate elders, particularly the head of the SH Terate Pragaan Branch, who served as the primary informant. Second, at least one officially recognized member of SH Terate.

This study utilizes primary data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and field documentation in the form of photographs. Meanwhile, secondary data was gathered through literature reviews, including academic papers, Clifford Geertz's books, and other reliable sources that ensure the consistency and validity of the data. The data analysis process was conducted by first categorizing the results of observations and interviews, then organizing them into findings based on key symbolic classifications (such as mori cloth, the seven springs, the seven-variety flower arrangement, and ritual processes). Finally, the interpretation of the findings was based on the symbolic theory proposed by Clifford Geertz in the concept of thick description. Data validity is established by comparing the results of observations and interviews with reference materials. The researcher then validates the symbolic meanings conveyed by the ritual participants.

This study also takes into account the researcher's position as a member of the Persudaraan Setia Hati Terate organization. The researcher's close relationship with the subjects of the study allowed for the development of trust with the informants, ensuring that the data collected was not merely normative but also reflective and in-depth. This approach aligns with the principles of emic anthropology, which seeks to understand cultural meanings from the perspective of the cultural actors themselves.

## **2.1 Basic Conceptual Nomenclature of Cultural Symbolism and Clifford Geertz's Thick Description**

Clifford Geertz was an anthropologist known for his method of using symbols to understand culture. Geertz was born on August 23, 1926, in San Francisco, California. His book "The Religion of Java", which is the result of his research, is considered one of the finest works of American-style anthropology. (A. Khoirul Anam 2016a). According to Geertz, when analyzing cultural symbolism, it is necessary to take into account the historical and social context in which those symbols are used. This means that symbols are not merely understood as standalone entities, but also within the context of a broader social and cultural system. Geertz explains symbolism by introducing the concept of "thick description," which focuses on understanding a literary text by delving deeper into its contents. Through this approach, Geertz aims to provide deeper insights into an event, as well as to explain the context, meaning, and social background that contribute to those actions. (Ata Sofia 2025b).

## **2.2 Culture as a Symbolic System**

In a symbolic context, Geertz asserts that culture is "a framework that gives meaning" to human behavior. Symbols which can take the form of objects, actions, sounds, or rituals serve as a means of conveying values and beliefs within a given society. Symbols do not exist in isolation; rather, they are deeply intertwined with a network of meanings shaped by

history, beliefs, and social structures (Riady 2021a). This line of thinking is consistent with recent research on rituals in Java, which shows that symbols serve as tools for conveying moral and spiritual teachings as well as a shared identity (Leariska and Agus M. Fauzi, 2024).

### **2.3 *Patterns of Culture: Symbols as Representations of Knowledge***

The concept of a “*pattern of culture*” refers to culture as a system of knowledge that guides how people understand reality. From this perspective, symbols such as *mori* cloth, the number seven, or the *setaman* flower can be interpreted as collective knowledge that is socially transmitted and serves as a foundation for understanding the world. In the context of Javanese society (Risma and Ashif Az Zafi, 2020), It is evident that the Suro month rituals embody a conceptual framework that shapes the community’s perspective on sacredness, time, and the relationship between humans and the metaphysical realm. Therefore, the symbols in the SH Terate *cuci mori* ritual not only possess aesthetic value but also serve as an embodiment of applied cultural knowledge.

### **2.4 *Pattern for Culture: Symbols as Guidelines for Action***

The concept of “*pattern for culture*” serves to emphasize culture as a framework for action that drives behavior. Symbols cannot be understood solely through cognition; they also serve as catalysts for concrete actions. Several studies on the SH Terate organization indicate that the symbols within its teachings play a role in shaping the character, ethics, and self-control of its members. In this context, the *cuci mori* ritual functions as a pattern of action that reinforces SH Terate values such as loyalty, purity of heart, and spiritual discipline. This activity is more than just a tradition; it is also a method for the community to shape the moral habitus of its members (Abdurrahman Wahid et al., 2025c).

### **2.5 *Thick Description: An In-Depth Analysis of Rituals***

The method of thick description proposed by Geertz provides the foundation for the analysis in this study. In this approach, rituals are viewed not merely as a series of physical activities, but also as cultural texts rich in meaning. An action that appears simple, such as immersing the *mori* in water from seven sources, must be understood within its context: the history of the founding of SH Terate, Javanese-Islamic values, beliefs related to the mystical world of the Suro month, and the structure of social relations within the organization. Research on the mysticism of the Suro month in other PSHT branches reinforces the argument that the Suro ritual is closely related to the concepts of sanctity, spiritual transition, and metaphysical protection (Ratih Baiduri et al., 2025a). Therefore, the thick description approach opens up opportunities for a more in-depth analysis of how the *cuci mori* ritual connects religious meaning, organizational identity, and Javanese symbolism.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 *The Cuci Mori Ritual During the Month of Suro*

The Javanese people refer to the month of Muharram as the month of Suro,<sup>1</sup> which is the first month of the Hijri calendar. The month of Suro is considered a time when the gates to the unseen world open and a moment of encounter between the physical world and the invisible world. Thus, the month of Suro is the perfect time for self-reflection, repentance, and moral renewal. Additionally, the month of Suro is believed to hold mystical significance applied to certain traditions, one of which is the tradition of *cuci mori* (Risma Aryanti and Ashif Az Zafi, 2020). *Cuci Mori* is a ritual revered by the Javanese people and performed by members of the *Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate* every Suro month. For the Javanese, the Suro month is considered a highly sacred period and a time for self-reflection. In Javanese tradition, this month is dedicated to purification, whether of heirlooms or for spiritual cleansing (Leariska Arisky and Agus M. Fauzi, 2024). One of the main activities in this series of events is the ritual washing of the *mori* cloth, a shroud typically used to wrap the deceased in funeral traditions. The *mori* washing ceremony is generally held in an area considered sacred and secluded, far from the hustle and bustle. The timing of the ceremony is aligned with the Javanese calendar and is often held at night during the month of Suro; specifically, it is usually conducted the night following the completion of the initiation ceremony for new members of the first level. This activity is led by the branch or chapter head, who serves as the ritual master or leader and is well-versed in the procedures and significance of the ritual.



Figure I: The Cuci Mori Procession



Figure II: The Mori Drying Procession

<sup>1</sup> The word “Suro” is derived from the word “Āshūrā,” which refers to the 10th day of the month of Muharram. In Islam, the month of Suro is regarded as a sacred month due to the prohibition against waging war against the pagan Quraysh. Meanwhile, according to the Shia, Suro is the month of mourning (*Syahr al-Nihāyah*) for the death of Husayn ibn Ali, who passed away on the 10th of Suro. The significance of Muharram lies in the celebration of the Islamic New Year, or the Hijri calendar. In Javanese tradition, the month of Suro is considered a sacred month filled with spiritual practices that symbolize self-purification. Suro is the calendar system established by Sultan Agung.

The stages of the Cuci Mori ceremony consist of three main components: the preparation stage, the purification ritual, and the closing prayer. During the preparation phase, all members of SH Terate prepare the necessary items, which include mori cloth, water drawn from seven springs, potted flowers, frankincense, incense, and offerings such as tumpeng and white jenang. The selection of water from seven springs holds symbolic meaning, representing the unification of the elements of life from the seven cardinal directions. Before the ritual begins, the branch chairman and the elders of SH Terate lead a prayer to open the event, seeking blessings from Almighty Allah so that all processes may proceed smoothly. The following is a statement from informant K. Mursyid N Hakim, chairman of the PSHT Pragaan Branch, Sumenep Chapter;

“The mori washing ritual is performed exclusively for members of SH Terate, specifically those who have been officially recognized as members for at least one year. Over time, the mori fabric tends to turn a yellowish-white color, and there is a concern that it may become soiled; therefore, it is necessary to conduct the mori washing ritual to cleanse it. We know that many people misunderstand the mori washing tradition at SH Terate; they view this practice as a form of idolatry. In reality, it is a meaningful act of spiritual purification. This practice has been upheld by the elders of SH Terate since its founding by Ki Hajar Harjo Utomo in 1922.”<sup>2</sup>

In the mori purification ritual, the mori cloth is placed in a container of water such as a tub or large basin that has been mixed with seven types of flowers, and is left to soak while the rawatib al-Haddad prayers are recited. In some other regions, the mori washing ritual is carried out exactly as it is here in the Pragaan Branch. However, prayers such as the Rawatib al-Haddad are not a requirement in this ritual; any method that fosters a solemn and reflective atmosphere is acceptable. The mori purification is not merely a symbol of cleansing an object but also a reflection and hope for all members of SH Terate to purify their hearts and minds of negative thoughts.

The final stage consists of a prayer and closing remarks. This prayer is recited collectively, led by the branch chairman and the elders of SH Terate, asking for safety, protection from disasters, and blessings for all those present. The water remaining from the mori purification process is believed to bring benefits, particularly to young people seeking a spouse; it is typically sprinkled on the participants or taken home to be mixed with bathwater. After the washing process is complete, the mori cloth is hung to dry in a shaded area so it is not directly exposed to sunlight. Meanwhile, the person who washed the mori is not allowed to sleep until the cloth is completely dry without the aid of sunlight.

### ***3.2 The Mori Cloth: A Symbol of Purity and Death***

Mori cloth is a plain white fabric, commonly known as a shroud, used to cover the deceased as they face the Almighty. In SH Terate, mori cloth is made into a sash as a sign that a person has been officially accepted as a member of SH Terate. White cloth is chosen

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<sup>2</sup> Interview on Thursday, October 30, 2025.

as a symbol of purity and a reminder of the inevitability of death (Rizky 2024). In addition, *cuci mori* is a form of spiritual purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) (Husain al-'Uffānī t.t, p. 1)<sup>3</sup> to encourage those performing the ritual to maintain a pure heart and conduct, to recognize that this world is temporary, and to prepare themselves spiritually for death. Within Clifford Geertz's framework, *mori* can also be viewed as a symbol of preservation that combines religious, moral, and local cultural elements. Furthermore, this symbol points to life in this world and the eternal, pure life in the afterlife. Through this washing ritual, the meaning of spiritual death is not seen as an end, but rather as a transition toward a higher level of purity through a profound cleansing of the soul.

### ***3.3 The Seven-Petaled Flower: A Symbol of Spiritual Energy***

The seven-colored flower is an important plant in Indonesian culture that plays a crucial role in various traditional activities and religious rituals. Its use is closely tied to its symbolic meanings, which reflect the connection between nature, spirituality, and the values of a community. This plant is often used in rituals to deepen the spiritual atmosphere. Overall, the presence of flowers in ritual events reflects reverence, beauty, and positive energy that create spiritual balance (Lily Yulia Surya Sari et al. 2019a). In the *cuci mori* tradition, seven types of flowers are presented as symbols of prayer and inner reverence toward a higher power. Each type of flower represents specific values, such as tranquility, purity, wisdom, harmony, and the hope of achieving balance among the existing spiritual elements. The presentation of flowers also serves to balance one's inner energy, uniting the soul and body so that the purification ritual can proceed smoothly and yield a profound spiritual impact (Fauzan 2012).

### ***3.4 The Seven Springs: A Symbol of Purification and Natural Harmony***

In some literature, water serves as a symbol of purification, reflecting transformation and renewal. One of the most striking examples is the baptism in the Jordan River, where water is used to wash away sins and begin a new life. In this context, water symbolizes repentance and spiritual renewal. This ritual demonstrates that water possesses the power to cleanse the soul, remove the burdens of the past, and provide an opportunity to embark on a new spiritual journey. The following is a statement from Zulfannany, a resident of SH Terate;

“Every year, we are entrusted by the Branch Chairman to collect water from those seven sources to be used for the purification of *mori* cloth. According to the teachings of SH Terate, this water is only available during the month of Suro. The water symbolizes a source of sustenance, but when used in the purification of *mori*

<sup>3</sup> The purification of the soul, or *tazkiyah al-nafs*, is a practice commonly observed by Sufis to purify themselves of bad traits, sins, and anything that defiles the heart. As Sheikh Sayyid Husain al-'Uffānī said

إن الحاجة شديدة إلى تزكية النفس وتطهيرها مما علق بها من الأدراان والشهوات، إذ بالتزكية تسمو النفس، وتعلو الهمة، وتنتج الروح نحو خالقها  
The need to purify the soul and cleanse it of impurities and base desires is urgent, for through this purification the soul will be ennobled, a zest for life will be cultivated, and the spirit will be directed toward Allah the Almighty. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

أكثرُوا ذكْرَ هَادِمِ اللذاتِ بِعَنيِ الموتِ

Frequently reflect on the destroyer of all pleasures, which is death (Narrated by Ahmad, al-Tirmidhi, al-Hasanah, al-Nisā'i, and Ibn Majah). Therefore, this practice serves as a reminder of death.

cloth, it signifies the cleansing of the heart from impure thoughts and despicable traits. The number seven itself represents the seven layers of heaven and earth. Since SH Terate is a natural science, the water from these seven sources used to purify *mori* signifies the perfection of creation and the balance of nature.”<sup>4</sup>

Water from seven sources resembles a stream flowing from seven clear and sacred springs, symbolizing purity and perfection. Symbolically, the number seven is highly versatile and profound across various cultures and spiritual traditions. The number seven is a powerful representation. In general, the number seven symbolizes perfect balance and spiritual harmony. Seven is considered a sacred number in several belief systems, representing the connection between the physical and spiritual realms (Metin Akiz 2016b). In the Cuci *Mori* ritual, the water symbolizes the removal of physical and mental impurities, the cleansing of sins, and the soothing of the soul so that it may receive new spiritual energy. The number seven is considered sacred and represents perfection in many symbolic systems; thus, the water from these seven sources signifies the unification of various spiritual elements into a single harmonious whole. Through this cleansing process using water, those performing the ritual hope to experience inner reconciliation, peace, and the moral readiness to lead a better life with heightened spiritual awareness.

### ***3.5 The Cuci Mori Ritual as a Means of Transmitting Values Across Generations***

In addition to serving as a symbol of the practice of spiritual purification, the *cuci mori* ritual also functions as a medium for transmitting values across generations within the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate. In tradition-based organizations, the transmission of values does not always occur through formal education, but also through collective rites that are repeated periodically, involving all members in direct interaction between the elders and the youth of SH Terate. The ritual serves as a means of internalizing values because it combines emotional, symbolic, and social experiences into a single sequence of shared actions (Clifford Geertz 1973).

The involvement of SH Terate youth members in the preparatory process for this ritual such as collecting water from seven springs, arranging the ritual paraphernalia, and adhering to the procedures established by the elders serves as an implicit space for ethical and spiritual learning. Values such as loyalty, discipline, patience, and respect for moral authority are instilled through practice, not merely through verbal instruction. This mode of transmission aligns with the perspective of cultural anthropology, which views rituals as the primary mechanism for the transmission of a community's collective habitus and values (Pierre Bourdieu 1977).

From Geertz's perspective, rituals function as both a model of and a model for social reality. The *cuci mori* ritual represents PSHT's perspective on purity and self-control, while also serving as a code of conduct that guides members' behavior in daily life. The repetition of the ritual every Suro month serves as a bridge connecting past generations with the present, ensuring the organization's identity remains unbroken by the passage of time. This reinforces research findings on the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate, which indicate that the

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<sup>4</sup> Interview on Monday, November 3, 2025.

organization's internal rituals serve to preserve the continuity of moral and spiritual values amidst the dynamics of modern society (2016c).

### **3.6 *The Mori Washing Ritual from Clifford Geertz's Anthropological Perspective***

Clifford Geertz coined the term “*thick description*” as a method for understanding culture, particularly as it relates to rituals and symbols. It is not merely superficial; it also has philosophical significance. Thick description involves a comprehensive analysis of events, statements, and objects within a ceremony. Symbols within the cultural context that surrounds them (Clifford geertz 1973, p. 6). Every element of the Cuci Mori ceremony such as the mori cloth, the mood, and the timing holds meaning that connects SH Terate members to the cultural and spiritual values they hold dear. Through the symbols practiced, this rite serves as a “living text” that reflects how SH Terate members understand loyalty, purity, and self-control, rather than merely a series of ritual actions.

### **3.7 *Rituals as Representations of Cultural Knowledge (Patterns of)***

The field description explains that the mori washing process is carried out through a series of structured steps, such as the use of water from seven sources, flower offerings, and the recitation of prayers. In a cultural context, these activities can be viewed not only as a sequence of physical actions but also as a reflection of how the SH Terate community interprets holiness, safety, and the relationship between humans and supernatural forces. For example, the use of water from seven sources serves as a symbol of Javanese cosmological knowledge, indicating that the number seven represents perfection and spiritual protection. This finding aligns with evidence that the number seven frequently appears in Suro month rituals as a means to ward off disasters and purify the soul (Risma and Ashif Az Zafi, 2020). In other words, this ritual serves as a framework of knowledge that reflects the SH Terate worldview regarding individual purity, the continuity of tradition, and the relationship between humans and the values inherited from their ancestors.

### **3.8 *Rituals as a Guide to Behavior (Pattern for)***

Field data indicates that the mori washing ceremony is not only performed to honor tradition but also as a means of instilling SH Terate's moral values such as simplicity, self-awareness, and spiritual strengthening in its members. From a cultural perspective, the symbols present in the ritual serve as a guide for action and character development. The cleaned mori cloth is not merely an object in the ceremony but also represents a process of spiritual cleansing: every SH Terate member is expected to maintain pure intentions, control their ego, and strengthen the ethics of brotherhood. These findings align with research indicating that SH Terate's internal rituals play a role in shaping the spiritual habitus that underpins the moral development of its members (Abdurrahman Wahid et al., 2025c). Thus, these symbols become guidelines that direct members to live the values of brotherhood, honesty, and self-control in their daily lives.

### **3.9 *Ritual as Structured Meaning***

The results of interviews and observations indicate that members of SH Terate view the mori cloth washing ritual as a time for spiritual reflection that unites individual identity with group identity. The mori cloth is interpreted as a symbol of devotion to the teachings

of SH Terate, while the washing process is seen as a spiritual renewal during the month of Suro. From Geertz's perspective, such rituals are considered systems of meaning that form a network linking symbols, actions, shared memories, and group identity. This reinforces that SH Terate's symbols play a role in clarifying the community's ideological and moral identity. Therefore, the *mori* washing ritual is not merely a cultural tradition but also a means of strengthening social bonds and a shared identity among members of SH Terate (Ediyono 2016c).

In practice, the *cuci mori* ritual is not free from contestation of meaning, particularly when viewed from the perspective of groups outside PSHT. Some circles perceive this ritual as a form of syncretism that potentially conflicts with normative Islamic teachings. However, the findings of this study reveal that members of SH Terate do not interpret the ritual as an act of venerating objects or invoking supernatural powers. Instead, they understand it as a symbolic expression of self-reflection and inner purification.

This difference in interpretation reflects what Geertz describes as a conflict of symbolic meanings, where the same symbol may carry diverse interpretations depending on the knowledge framework and cultural experiences of different communities. Therefore, a symbolic anthropological approach becomes essential in preventing reductive judgments toward local religious practices. In this context, the *cuci mori* ritual represents an effort by an organization to maintain harmony between Islamic values, Javanese traditions, and the spiritual needs of its members.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on the *cuci mori* ritual in the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) tradition during the month of Suro, it can be concluded that this practice is a cultural expression that contains a structured system of meaning. Through Clifford Geertz's symbolic approach, this ritual demonstrates the integration of symbols, cultural knowledge, and collectively inherited moral values. First, the ritual's structural stages from preparing materials, the washing process, to drying the *mori* cloth—represent a “pattern of culture,” namely the community's perspective on personal purity and the interpretation of the Suro month as a time to renew spiritual connections. Each symbolic element, such as water from seven sources and a bouquet of flowers, is part of the Javanese people's cosmological knowledge system, which is adopted and reinterpreted within the context of the PSHT organization. Second, this ritual also functions as a pattern for culture that is, a guide for PSHT members in internalizing the organization's values. The *mori* purification process is understood as a reflection of efforts to purify the soul, exercise self-control, and maintain moral integrity. Thus, this ritual aims to affirm the spiritual dimension and strengthen the ethos of brotherhood and discipline that form the collective identity of PSHT. Third, from the perspective of thick description, the practice of *cuci mori* demonstrates that cultural symbols cannot be understood in isolation from the social, historical, and emotional contexts of the community. The full meaning of the ritual becomes apparent only when interpreted through the interplay between the structure of the actions,

the organization's values, and the collective memory of its members. Through this approach, the cuci mori ritual emerges as a cultural text that blends Javanese-Islamic traditions, spiritual values, and moral teachings that are alive within the organization.

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