

## CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *NONDOI* RITUAL IN SHAPING THE IDENTITY OF EAST KALIMANTAN, INDONESIA'S NEW CAPITAL CITY

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**Abstract.** The Indonesian government's decision to relocate the capital to East Kalimantan carries implications for the indigenous Paser people, raising concerns about the potential diminishment of their rich cultural heritage, including the *Nondo* ritual. This qualitative research focuses on understanding the construction of the Paser community identity, explicitly emphasizing the *Nondo* ritual deeply rooted in ancestral traditions. This study used an ethnographic method to unveil key characteristics within Paserese society through observations and interviews with traditional leaders, community figures, and *mulung* (shaman). The findings demonstrate that the *Nondo* ritual, enriched with religious, spiritual, noble, social, and morally moderate values, plays a pivotal role in expressing and preserving the identity of the Paser community. As East Kalimantan becomes the new capital, the *Nondo* ritual is a vital cultural force strengthening the Paserese identity amidst evolving socio-cultural landscapes.

**Keywords:** cultural heritage, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, ritual, indigenous, shaman.

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## 1. Introduction

The relocation of Indonesia's capital city from Jakarta to East Kalimantan is scheduled in stages throughout 2024. This move is prompted by Jakarta's high population density, aiming to alleviate environmental pressures on the economic and governmental epicenter. The new capital city, commonly abbreviated as Ibu Kota Negara (IKN), is situated in the Penajam Paser Utara Regency (PPU) within the East Kalimantan Province. The PPU Regency encompasses four sub-districts: Penajam, Waru, Babalu, and Sepaku. Notably, Sepaku, housing the Zero Kilometer Point of the Archipelago, is selected as the central location for the government. As the prospective new State Capital (IKN), the PPU Regency is inevitably undergoing modernization across various aspects of life, including its culture (Nasir et al. 2023). One of the consequences of relocating to a new capital city is the potential loss of local culture, such as the *Nondo* ritual. However, beyond its ritualistic nature, *Nondo* holds intrinsic cultural values. Consequently, it becomes imperative to delve into the study of the *Nondo* ritual to uncover and preserve the cultural values embedded within the ritual. This understanding can then be applied to shape the identity of the new capital city.

PPU Regency is home to a diverse array of ethnic groups. Alongside the indigenous Paser and Paser Balik communities, the region is also inhabited by Javanese and Bugis ethnic groups, constituting the majority of immigrant ethnicities. Additionally, there are several other ethnic groups present, such as the Sundanese and Toraja. A significant portion of the immigrant communities relocated due to the transmigration program, and over time, they have integrated with the local population. With the imminent relocation of the government center from Jakarta to East Kalimantan Province (PPU), it is anticipated that there will be an influx of immigrant communities, particularly among the state apparatus.

The Paser community is distributed evenly across four sub-districts in the PPU Regency. The number of family heads within this community reaches into the thousands. In contrast, the Balik Paser predominantly resides in Kecamatan Sepaku, with family heads ranging between 100–200. Outside of Kecamatan Sepaku, 1 to 2 families from the Balik Paser community live in Kecamatan Waru and Babalu. In Kecamatan Sepaku, the Balik Paser community concentrates on Kelurahan Sepaku Lokdam and Kelurahan Pamaluan. However, it is important to note that this ethnic group constitutes a minority among other ethnicities. For instance, in Bumi Harapan Village, which is also part of Kecamatan Sepaku, the Balik Paser community is considered a minority group, as the majority of the population in this village is Javanese. In this village, only three heads of families from the Balik Paser community reside and share familial ties.

The cultures of Paser and Balik Paser communities are similar due to the historical context of the Balik Paser community, which emerged as an intersection between the Paser Kingdom and the Kutai Kingdom. In the early stages of its history, the Paser culture served as the primary cultural reference for the Balik Paser community. However, during the Kutai Kingdom era, the influence of Kutai culture on the Balik

Paser community became notable. This influence was particularly significant as a Paser customary chief was appointed as an official in the Kutai Kingdom, blending Kutai cultural elements with the existing cultural fabric of the Paser Balik community.

Regarding cultural sustainability, the Paser community's culture is more enduring, as a significant portion remains integral to the community's daily life. Among these cultural practices is the *Nondoï* ritual, a tradition for purifying the village from negative influences. *Nondoï* is a time-honored ritual passed down through generations, observed annually. It stands as the oldest traditional ritual of the Paser people. Presently, to enhance tourist attraction to PPU Regency, the *Nondoï* ritual is organized in conjunction with other cultural festivals.

In the context of this research, the central question revolves around whether the *Nondoï* ritual can effectively encapsulate the identity of the new capital city of Indonesia. This study seeks to elucidate the formation of the identity of the Penajam Paser Utara community in the national capital, with a particular focus on the representation found in the *Nondoï* ritual. The paper addresses the significance of utilizing rituals as a means or medium for realizing identity.

## 2. Literature review

Recent research in anthropology has extensively explored the interplay between rituals and the intrinsic values entrenched within various communities and indigenous groups. Notable studies conducted by Temchenko (2022), Sandarupa (2016), and Manurung et al. (2022) have illuminated how cultural practices and traditions, such as the significance of the 'sitting' position in Slavic rituals (Temchenko 2022), the *retteng* poetry among the Toraja (Sandarupa 2016), and the Basambu Umang ritual of the Meratus Dayak (Manurung et al. 2022), serve as conduits for preserving and reinforcing cultural norms and values. These studies offer insights into how these rituals and traditions uphold and fortify the societal fabric by encapsulating and transmitting essential values across generations.

Research with a similar thematic focus was conducted by Hidajad (2022), exploring the intricate relationship between ritual practices and the adaptation of values within *Sandur* cultural performances. Hidajad's study demonstrated how the *Sandur* culture effectively employs symbols to instill normative transcendence, countering the adverse effects of globalization. Onipede and Phillips (2021) examined the correlation between ritual practices and collective identity, specifically analyzing the impact of the *Ode* Festival on the Yoruba community in Southwest Nigeria. Their research highlights the festival's potential significance in broader initiatives to foster national cohesion and unity.

Recent studies have extensively discussed the *Nondoï* ritual within the context of East Kalimantan from varied perspectives. Kristanti (2018) delves into the presentation of *besoyong* (mantra prayer) within the Belian Paser *Nondoï* Traditional Festival, focusing on specific ritual aspects and intricacies surrounding *besoyong*'s participation. In contrast, Hamsiati (2021) directs her research toward examining the

values of religious moderation prevalent in Paser society, particularly manifested through the *Nondoï* ritual. Additionally, Widaty and Apriati's (2021) study emphasizes the significance of the *Belian* ceremony within traditional medicine rituals, positioning it as a pivotal element integral to the comprehensive understanding of the *Nondoï* ritual. Their work sheds light on the role of this ceremony in traditional healing practices within Paser communities in the Penajam Paser Utara District.

After conducting a literature review, we found that research on *Nondoï* rituals in East Kalimantan has been approached from various angles. These include the rituals' connection to religious moderation, the use of traditional medicine, and the intricate nature of the ritual itself. Our study aims to have a conversation that intertwines the ritualistic aspects with the indigenous community's values and identity, following the research perspective of Onipede and Phillips (2021). To achieve this, we rely on three main conceptual pillars: ritual, value, and identity.

The significance of rituals within cultures or societies lies in their embodiment of deeply ingrained beliefs, values, and norms. Zunner-Keating, Avetyan, and Shepard (2020) define rituals as acts or series of regularly repeated acts embodying a group of people's beliefs and creating a sense of continuity and belonging. Rituals operate beyond mere practicality or the natural world, delving into the realms of symbolism and the supernatural, and they hold profound cultural significance, shedding light on a community's worldview, belief systems, experiences, and collective identity (Zunner-Keating et al. 2020). Rituals may involve individual practices or collective ceremonies, serving as windows into a community's worldview and encapsulating their passions and perspectives (Zunner-Keating et al. 2020). Rituals are patterned, repetitive, and symbolic enactments of cultural or individual beliefs and values (Davis-Floyd and Laughlin 2022).

Anthropologists have proposed various definitions of ritual, but a widely accepted understanding highlights its distinctiveness from everyday behaviors, its symbolism, and its role in embodying cultural meanings (Davis-Floyd and Laughlin 2022, Wu 2018, Zunner-Keating et al. 2020). Rituals are not limited to religious contexts; they can also be related to politics, economy, or kinship, and they are patterned human activities with deep cultural meaning stipulated by each cultural group (Davis-Floyd and Laughlin 2022). Rituals are complex and multifaceted, embodying cultural meanings, beliefs, and values and serving as powerful communicative forms that provide insights into understanding a given culture or social group (Davis-Floyd and Laughlin 2022).

Frazer (1922) argues that humans address the challenges of their lives by employing their minds and knowledge systems. However, these cognitive faculties and knowledge systems inherently have limitations. Individuals often resort to occult means to resolve issues that elude reason (Koentjaraningrat 1990). The practice of communicating with the supernatural is often associated with rituals. In practical terms, rituals generate collective emotions tied to symbols, establishing the foundation for beliefs, thoughts, morality, and culture (Foley 2011).

According to Ashworth (2020), Von Danial (2005), and Suhamihardja (1993), rituals are regarded as ancestral legacies rich in meanings and symbols, serving as guiding principles for the community. The symbols interpreted in traditional rituals

or ceremonies encapsulate values and norms, typically conveying messages through religious teachings and ethical and moral values. These values can be communicated, reactivated, or embraced, ensuring they remain deeply embedded and continue to guide people's lives (Sudarma 2005).

Fundamentally, culture encompasses values that persistently undergo inheritance, interpretation, and implementation through social change. Meanwhile, a value is a belief grounded in a societal code of ethics (Dayakisni 2009). Values delineate what is right or wrong, guiding current and future life choices and shaping interpretations of past life experiences. In simpler terms, cultural values encapsulate the conceptual understanding shared by most society members (Giro 2001). Saleh Marzuki (2012) states that a value is perceived as good and beneficial, providing direction or influencing people's attitudes toward an object. Values are susceptible to change based on the context or environment that exerts influence. Essentially, a value is a positive concept consistently sought after, aspired to, and considered significant by all individuals as members of society (Setiadi et al. 2008).

In this study, we conceptualize identity as both produced and constructed. Socially constructing identity occurs as individuals express themselves, subjecting their identity to judgment and acceptance by other groups (Barker 2003). Individuals actively align themselves with a group identity based on shared emotions and values with others in the group (Mintargo 1993). This active alignment connects their identity intricately to the cultural values of the collective group (Dewi 2011).

Rituals and identity share a close connection because, through rituals, the practicing group communicates and reflects its existence through various symbols and meanings, serving as a marker of its identity (Marsh 2004, Summers-Effler 2006, Trillò et al. 2022, Van Der Beek 2017). Ritual holds a crucial position in discussions about identity for several reasons. First, it serves as a medium for messaging and achieving balance in the cosmos. Second, it represents a transformation of attitude from the profane to the sacred (Rumahuru 2020). Third, it functions as a medium the community utilizes to produce, experience, and justify beliefs and ideas (Durkheim 2001, 1984). Fourth, rituals are viewed as justifying communal unity (Turner 1967). Through the implementation of rituals, individuals engaging in the rituals feel connected to a sacred subject and receive protection (Bell 1992, Durkheim 2016).

### **3. Research methodology**

This study applies an ethnographic method to explore the phenomenon under investigation and various aspects related to it. This method aims to describe and summarize various conditions, situations, or social realities within the community that is the research subject. It seeks to unveil the characteristics, traits, models, signs, or descriptions of specific community conditions, situations, or phenomena (Bungin 2009).

The three data collection techniques employed in this study included: (1) a literature review involving the examination of pre-existing written data; (2) a documentation study, which encompassed the analysis of data presented in the form

of films and photographs; (3) open-ended interviews, which allowed informants to respond to predefined answers.

However, to maintain focus on the study's objectives, the interviews were conducted using a guideline-directed towards several key informants. These informants included the leader of the *mulung* custom, *penggading* (sacred offerings maker), *Tukang serah seron* (conveyer of the wish), Paser Customary Head, community leaders, and village leaders.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Result

#### 4.1.1. Overview of Penajam Paser Utara

Penajam Paser Utara (PPU) is a regency in the East Kalimantan Province, established through Law No. 7 of 2002 concerning the Establishment of Penajam Paser Utara Regency as an expansion area of Paser Regency. Penajam Paser Utara, covering an area of 3,333.06 km<sup>2</sup>, is divided into a land area of 3,060.82 km<sup>2</sup> and an ocean area of 272.24 km<sup>2</sup>. Geographically, the PPU Regency is between 00°48'37"–01°36'37" South latitude and 116°19'30"–116°56'35" East longitude.

Administratively, various regions share borders with the PPU Regency. To the North, Loa Kulu District and Loa Janan District of Kutai Kertanegara Regency border it. To the East, it shares borders with the Samboja Sub-district of Kutai Kertanegara Regency, Balikpapan City, and the Makassar Strait. To the South, the boundaries extend to the Longkali Sub-district of Paser Regency and the Makassar Strait. To the West, it shares borders with the Longkali Sub-district of Paser Regency and Bongan Sub-district of West Kutai Regency.

PPU Regency is divided into four sub-districts: Penajam Sub-district, with its capital Nipah; Waru Sub-district, with its capital Waru; Babulu Sub-district, with its capital Babulu Darat; and Sepaku Sub-district, with its capital Tengin Baru. The population of the PPU Regency is heterogeneous, consisting of Javanese, Banjar, Bugis, Mandar, Dayak, and Paser tribes, with the Paser tribe being the longest-standing and contributing significantly to the regency's cultural identity. Despite being the smallest population-wise compared to immigrant tribes, the Paser community is culturally rich, exemplified by traditions such as the *Nondo* ritual.

#### 4.1.2. *Nondo* ritual

In the oral folklore tradition related to the kingdom in Tanah Paser, it is recounted that King Nuas once led a kingdom. After King Nuas's demise, his descendants succeeded him as the subsequent rulers. Among them, King Nalau, the descendant of King Nuas, was a prosperous leader and earned the nickname King Tondo, signifying the leader of prosperity. Nalau Raja Tondo was the son of Putri Petong during the Sadurengas kingdom. The evidence of the Sadurengas kingdom persists today in the form of the Sadurengas museum in Paser Regency. As King Nalau aged,

he passed the kingdom to his son, Sumping. King Sumping conducted *Belian*, an offering to the gods and spirits led by a *mulung* (shaman) to seek safety. During this period, belief in supernatural spirits governing nature remained strong, and *mulungs* were regarded as shamans capable of connecting with the ancestors of the spirits.

During this research, we interviewed a *mulung* named Suwis, a traditional leader of the *Nondoï* ritual. According to Suwis, Raja Tondoï, one of the kings of Kasultanan Paser, performed this ritual. King Tondoï is revered and considered a deity who controls nature, water, forests, valleys, and mountains. Legend has it that one day, King Tondoï was paralyzed and, feeling lonely and saddened, dreamt of creating a bracelet from iron (*gitang*) wrapped with rattan. The king wore the bracelet, along with animal fangs believed to act as repellents, leading to his recovery from the illness. Suwis explained that the term '*Nondoï*' is derived from the word '*tondoï*,' which means washing heirlooms, and '*kelian*,' which means strong or healed. As an oral tradition, it lacks scientific evidence; however, the folklore is deeply believed and considered trustworthy by the people of Paser.

*Nondoï* is regarded as one of the most significant rituals, aiming to purify the village or country for 7 to 8 nights, addressing disturbances caused by spirits. Before 2014, *Nondoï* was carried out individually in each village. However, post-2014, Paser Customary Institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations in PPU Regency collaboratively organized *Nondoï* alongside cultural arts events of the Paser community. The *Nondoï* traditional feast has evolved into an iconic event uniting the community within a single art-cultural forum facilitated by the PPU Regency government. While the traditional feast is held annually, it was temporarily halted during the Covid-19 pandemic. The festival resumed in 2022 and 2023. The execution of this activity has received legal backing through the Regional Regulation of Penajam Paser Utara Regency No. 2 of 2017 concerning the Preservation and Protection of Paser customs. Establishing this legal framework reflects the local government's commitment to preserving the cultural heritage of its people.

During the implementation of the *Nondoï* traditional feast ritual, which occurred on October 24–27, 2022, and in October 2023, the community showcased various forms of arts and culture unique to Paser. These included exhibitions of traditional handicrafts of the Paser community, regional dances, performances by *gambus* artists, *betore* competitions (traditional rhymes), and *bekuntau* (traditional martial arts). In the evening, the *Nondoï* ritual unfolded with the following sequence of traditional rituals: *Serah seron*, *mulung* preparation, *tepong tawar*, *nyembah bungo buen*, *nyembah selaman*, *ngingke jawaliau*, *besoyong*, *mandor epo boah olong/ngilir*, *jeda/nguntilang*, *ngundang belai tana*, *ngasi lenga*, *ngunti sagi*, *ngasi bungo*, return of supernatural spirits, *telong* (rest), and *larung jakit*.

We generally obtained an overview of the *Nondoï* ritual event in the traditional house called *Kuta Rakan Tatau*. The information gathered encompasses various aspects such as human resources, art, language, musical instruments, types of food, herbs, and plants used to support the ritual. All these elements must be fulfilled to ensure the smooth running of the ritual, and they are managed sequentially, systematically, and procedurally. The organization and coordination of these

elements fall under the purview of the *mulung*, the customary leader in Penajam Paser Utara District.

In implementing *Nondo* ritual activities, the key figure is not only the *mulung*, but also several individuals who play vital roles in ensuring the smoothness and success of the event. These include *Penggading*, *Sendro Mulung*, *Tukang Serah Teron*, *Arang Juata Dance* (5–8 people), ritual music players (15 people), and the Paser customary head, all of whom accompany and assist the *mulung* from preparation to the conclusion of the activity.

One crucial supporting role for the *mulung* is the *penggading*, responsible for preparing everything the *mulung* needs. The *penggading* must always be at the *mulung*'s side, as they possess the best understanding and are essential in preparing equipment, materials, and other necessities for the *mulung* during ritual events. Several *mulung* have performed the *Nondo* ritual in the Penajam Paser Utara district, including Mungang, Sahmin, Nyemat, Ipit Drik, and Suwis Santoso. Suwis Santoso, the son of Mr. Mungang, also led the *Nondo* ritual simultaneously.

Every *Nondo* ritual event is meticulously prepared with equipment and materials for smooth execution. The musical accompaniment for the ritual includes the *gong* (*agong*), *tung*, drum (*tino*), *kelentangen*, *lumba*, and *penengkah*. The purpose of the music is to accompany the dance performed by the *mulung* during the *besoyong* procession, which involves mantra prayers. Different dances and mantras spoken by the *mulung* are complemented by varied music, aligning with the rhythm and content of the spoken words. The *mulung* adorn themselves with specific attire and accessories, such as *gitang* (bracelet), *sambang sambit* (necklace made of fangs), *lawung utok* (head turban), *lelangit* (curtain), *ulap* (*mulung* sarong), and *pendeng*.

As the ritual leader, the *mulung* must thoroughly understand and memorize numerous orally transmitted mantras inherited from their predecessors. These mantras encompass diverse meanings, philosophies, and purposes. While some words in the mantras are derived from the Paser language, there are instances where



Figure 1. Mr. Mungang (Suwis's father/*Mulung*), Suwis, and *Penggading* (Suwis's mother).

Source: Eko Supriadi, 2023.



Figure 2. Sea offerings and 100 species of plants. Source: Eko Supriadi, 2023.

certain words are not part of the Paser language lexicon, known and comprehended solely by the *mulung*, who holds the key to their meanings.

The *Nondoï* ritual involves various roles, including helpers, musicians, dancers, and individuals responsible for preparing all necessary elements for the ceremony. Essential equipment for the ritual encompasses food, grains, diverse flowers, plants, and animals. Each requirement must be meticulously arranged and positioned throughout the *Nondoï* ritual, from the initial stages to its conclusion, marked by releasing offerings into the river. The ritual incorporates many Paserese traditional foods, grains, flowers, and plants, totaling 100 species. The *mulung* precisely remembers and recognizes each of these 100 types of species. While most of these items are still readily available in the Paser region, certain plants have become scarce, necessitating sourcing from outside the Penajam Paser Utara region.

In the *Nondoï* ritual, *Mulung* administers healing treatments through magical mantra prayers for individuals facing health issues, especially ailments resistant to conventional remedies and attributed to spiritual disturbances. Mantra prayers are also extended to bless agricultural land, provide solace for those affected by disasters, cleanse the village of spiritual disturbances, aid those with memory disorders or mental illnesses, ensure fertility for crops, and fulfill vows. Mr. Suwis Santoso, a *mulung*, emphasizes that the *Nondoï* ritual procession follows distinct procedures each night, contingent on the specific intentions of the individual, whether directed towards village purification or serving as a non-medical treatment.



Figure 3. Mulung performing treatment with soyong (mantra prayer). Source: Eko Supriadi, 2023.

On the first night, the *Nondo* ritual starts from 20:00 until 05:00. This first night is called *nindu* (opening night). At this time, *Mulung* recites *soyong* (prayer spells) containing content certain people understand. One of the *soyongs* repeated on this initial night is:

*Engket sindai mamoruko*  
*Duo derang mamoruko*  
*Tolu derang mamoruko*  
*Opat derang mamoruko*  
*Limo derang mamoruko*  
*Onom derang mamoruko*  
*Turu derang mamoruko*  
*Walu derang mamoruko*  
*Siye derang mamuruko*  
*Siye te wase ampe*

This mantra prayer asks for the blessing of the nine saints. A prayer follows this:

*Engket sindai buat tabe*  
*Duo derang buat tabe*  
*Tolu derang buat tabe*  
*Opat derang buat tabe*  
*Limo derang buat tabe*  
*Onom derang buat tabe*  
*Turu derang buat tabe*  
*Walu derang buat tabe*

This mantra prayer asks for permission and blessings to heaven and earth.

*Mulung* conducts *soyong simong* (communal prayers) at all ritual sites. Then, from the second to the fourth night of the ritual, the *mulung* chants *malom ngantung ngalom bayung* (the night of splicing). On the fifth night, the *mulung* performs *malom nyabi* (the night of saying goodbye to the supernatural) by beating the *gendang agong* (grand drum). On the sixth night, *mulung* performs *nyundok*, signifying the night of closure and communal eating. During the sixth and seventh nights, *mulung* engages in *nembot ruwo*, returning the spirit to its original place.

#### 4.1.3. Stages of the *Nondo* ritual procession

The complete procession of the *Nondo* ritual was stated by the Chairman of the Paser Customary Defense Agency, Mr. Paidah Riansyah, as follows:

On the first night of the *Nondo* ritual, the *arang juwata* dance opens the ceremony. The introductory activity involves playing all musical instruments, and the *penggading* organizes various items like *kebuong bungo*, native chicken eggs, candles, honey, rice, coins, and others. Following this, *Mulung* initiates the *belian* ritual (a healing treatment) by reciting a mantra known as *besoyong*. During this ritual, one *mulung* bathes another *mulung* in front of the main gate where the ceremony is conducted. The water used for Bathing is infused with flowers. The *mulung* then splashes the water while chanting mantras, accompanied by music.

Every village has a *mulung*, but Mr. Suwis Santosa consistently leads the significant annual *Nondoï* ritual. Bathing The *mulung* procession aims to enable the *mulung* to conduct a purification ceremony for the body and soul, hoping that all wishes and aspirations can be fulfilled. The Bathing usually occurs at midnight or at specific times as directed by *mulung* Mr. Suwis. On this first night, *mulung* wears the gitang (bracelet), serving as a symbol to ancestral spirits, marking the commencement of the ritual and ensuring that evil spirits do not interfere during the ceremony.

Several other rituals are integral to *Nondoï*, including *Tipong Tawar*, where a *mulung* conveys wishes to the ancestors for happiness, tranquility, goodness, and purity resembling moonlight. At this stage, the *Tukang serah seron* (messenger of wishes) becomes known as responsible for delivering tools to the *mulung*. Some of these tools include:

- Nyerah panja war bulau* (handing over an expanse of gold)
- Nyerah selaman lawai* (handing over thread embroidery)
- Nyerah potan puti tinangkorong* (handing over white upright chopsticks)
- Nyerah ibus* (handing over the ritual center)
- Nyerah tolang jamban onam buti* (handing over six grains of jamban bamboo)
- Nyerah solong panjurungan* (handing over the mantra oil container)
- Nyerah taruk iyu engket silu* (handing over the shark fin)

*Mulung* then receives the seron handover from the seron handler, who recounts the items given to the *penggading* for verification.

On the second night of the *Nondoï* ritual, the *Penggading* informs the *seron* handler about the wishes of the gods and ancestors through the *mulung*. Suppose there are any areas for improvement in the items provided to the *mulung*, such as offerings or other necessities. In that case, the *seron* handler can supplement them to ensure the smooth progress of the ritual. If there are still deficiencies, the *mulung* is typically hesitant to proceed with the ritual, fearing it may displease the gods.

On the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh nights of the *Nondoï* ritual, the *Penggading* returns to the *seron* handler the wishes conveyed to the gods through the *mulung*. On the sixth night of the ritual, individuals possessing heirlooms such as kris, *tumbak*, cauldron, or *mandau*, who wish to participate in the heirloom purification procession can entrust their heirlooms to the *mulung* for the ceremonial Bathing.

On the eighth night or the closing night of the *Nondoï* ritual, several rituals commence around 6 a.m. The first ritual is *Namburoso*, aiming to summon spirits or magical beings to showcase all the items handed over by the *mulung*. Subsequently, the *mulung* leads the *Nyukit Lenga Pangkase* ritual, involving the loving anointing of oil on children who struggle with speech. The *Nyukit Lenga Pangkase* ritual is intended to improve their vocal abilities for Quranic recitation, singing, or public speaking, making the children more obedient and less mischievous. The next stage is *Empit Nauk*, a ritual for safety and tranquility. Following this is *Ngundus Tuo*, a ceremony to bathe government officials, promoting clear thinking, protection from disturbances, and fair decision-making. During this ritual, officials sit on a yellow/



Figure 4. Child of *Mulung* who participated in the ritual and *Nulak jukat* at the peak of the *Nondo'i* ritual. Source: Eko Supriadi, 2023.

green bamboo chair with a white chicken prepared. The final stage is *Nulak Jakit*, the culmination of the *Nondo'i* ritual, symbolized by a floating wooden raft adorned with a crocodile head and tail ornaments, Nipah trees, offerings, snacks, and typical Paserese food. This ritual expresses gratitude for the blessings and salvation God Almighty bestows, with the crocodile symbolizing Raja Tondo'i, inhabiting rivers and representing happiness and tranquility in its yellow color.

#### 4.2. Discussion

Referring to the folklore within the Paser community, the *Nondo'i* ritual serves as a means to seek salvation through the supernatural spirits of ancestors. This ritual underscores the identity of the Paser people, who, at that time, held beliefs in supernatural spirits (dynamism) before the influence of Islam permeated Paser. The *Nondo'i* ritual functions as a medium for curing ailments, averting disasters, promoting fertility, ensuring agricultural success, and cleansing villages and land, ultimately seeking safety. An integral element of this ritual involves seeking protection and safety and maintaining social relations among community members. These rituals not only strengthen social bonds within the Paser community but also foster close relationships between family members and generations. Another crucial element is the robust spiritual aspect, encompassing *besoyong* (mantra prayer) and magical behaviors in the Paser community. This tradition's resilience is evident in its continuous annual observance.

Through the *Nondo'i* ritual, the Paser community manifests the influence of beliefs and values, creating a legacy for future generations. The transmission of values by the *mulung* customary leader to his 11-year-old son solidifies the continuity of values, with the expectation that the son will eventually succeed his father as the *mulung*. *Mulung* imparts wisdom to his progeny by consistently involving his son in the *Nondo'i* proceedings. *Mulung* operates collaboratively, relying on the support of *penggading*, *sendro mulung*, *teron handlers*, *arang juata* dancers, musicians, and the Paser traditional chief. The distribution of responsibilities among *mulung* and his

aides emphasizes that power is not centralized solely in *mulung* but is shared among the various participants engaged in the ritual (Balan 2010).

A *mulung* inherited his *mulung* knowledge from his father, who was also a *mulung*, indicating the hereditary nature of the *mulung* position. Becoming a *mulung* is no simple task; ideally, one should be a descendant of a *mulung* and possess the spiritual leadership talent required for the role. Nevertheless, there are also *mulung sombeng*, individuals not born into a *mulung* lineage but exhibit the necessary talent. To attain the status of a *mulung*, one must undergo 40 days of meditation and fasting on the mountain.

The significance of the *Nondo* ritual becomes apparent when considering the interplay between religion and tradition that molds the Paser community. The people of Paser coalesce local knowledge and religion, and this relationship assumes diverse forms contingent upon individuals' interpretations of their religious teachings. Consequently, Paser society exhibits a distinctive character, particularly evident in its ritual practices.

Examining the contemporary context of the *Nondo* ritual and its symbols reveals several meanings: First, the ritual holds religious significance as an act of worship towards the supreme power (God), reflecting the commitment to maintain the adopted religion (mainly Islam) within the Paser community. Second, nobility is valued, encompassing respect for ancestors and cultivating harmonious relations with supernatural entities. Respect for ancestors is manifested through the fulfillment of customary demands. Third, the ritual fosters social values by promoting community solidarity and fostering fraternal bonds among the diverse Paser community. Cooperation, assistance, unity, mutual respect, and collaboration are evident from the preparation stage to the execution of the ritual.

Additionally, there is mutual respect among individuals of different religions (including Protestant Christians) and ethnicities (Bugis, Toraja, Madura, Sunda, and Javanese) within the Paser community. Fourth, the *Nondo* ritual encapsulates a value of religious moderation in the local wisdom of the Paser community. It provides an inclusive space for people of different beliefs, ethnicities, and cultures to gather, witness, and receive prayers for their safety through *soyong* (mantra prayer) led by a *mulung*. Therefore, the ritual's role unifies the diverse Paser community.

Implementing the *Nondo* ritual is an integral part of the lives of the Paser people in the Penajam Paser Utara Regency area, which is slated to become the national capital. The *Nondo* ritual is a religious and magical tradition that also serves as a representation of collective identity. As a cultural identity, the *Nondo* Ritual reflects the cultural expression of the Paser people, helping them maintain traditions and preserve their cultural heritage.

## 5. Conclusions

The Paser people, indigenous to the Penajam Paser Utara region, are facing the prospect of their land becoming the new capital of Indonesia. Among their rich local culture, the *Nondo* ritual stands out. The study reveals that the *Nondo* ritual

holds religious, noble, social, and religious moderation values. These cultural values within the *Nondo* ritual serve as a medium for expressing the identity of the Paser community, encompassing (1) robust bonds of togetherness among individuals, families, and the Paser community; (2) spirituality manifested through a belief in ancestral heritage values; (3) the sustainability of value inheritance throughout the human life cycle; (4) religious moderation enabling harmonious community relations across ethnic and religious boundaries; (5) religiosity demonstrated through the practice of ancestral heritage values in everyday life.

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