

The Communication Behavior of Street Children within the Cultural Context (A Study of Street Children in Indonesia)

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The Communication Behavior of Street Children within the Cultural Context: A Study of Street Children in Indonesia

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Abstract

In Indonesia, unfortunate children facing dire circumstances, including victims of war, forced labor, child abuse, and human trafficking, are prevalent. Among them, street kids endure rapid growth due to various factors, living in abusive ¹⁶ environments and spending approximately eight hours daily wandering the streets. This study aimed to explore the uniqueness of street children near the tombs of Islamic saints (Wali), where they descend to interact with pilgrims during religious events, seeking alms. Employing a phenomenological approach, the research examined the children's motives and communication behaviors to capture the pilgrims' attention. Findings revealed that economic reasons and peer influence were primary motives for the children's street presence. Additionally, sacred events like Muludan, Malam Pelal, Syawalan, Serenan, Sedekah Bumi/Nadran, and Kliwonan marked peak times for their begging activities, associated with poverty and ritualistic behaviors. Understanding street children's communication behaviors and dynamics in this cultural context offers valuable insights for social interventions and support.

Keywords: *children's motives; communication behavior; cultural context; phenomenology; ritual; street children*

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Introduction

Research that explains children's behaviors typically controls for environmental factors. Children prefer to follow their desires or the instructions of outsiders when engaging in particular actions. When learning, playing, and developing social interests, they are highly affected by their parents and other people around them.

Social learning theory in behaviorism suggests that through habituation, an individual follows a simple learning pattern due to environmental stimuli (Timberlake & Lucas, 2019; Yusuf, 2005). Santrock and Yussen, as cited in Bajari (2011), suggested that "each of us develops in certain ways like all other individuals, like some other individuals, and like no other individuals." This statement is also applicable to street children. These children grow up under the direct or indirect influence of the environment. They inherit only street values and creatively develop new values because they are on the street for eight hours or more daily.

From the field evidence collected, the study found that adults, particularly parents, strongly determine the development of a street child (Edinyang et al., 2020; Vergara del

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Solar et al., 2022). The behaviors of the adults or parents around children determine the children's behavior (Bellamy, 2001).

Regarding time spent in a week, most street children work seven days per week. Nearly 70% of surveyed street children stated that they work every day. If it is to calculate the working time for a day, most street children work from four to twelve hours per day (Adriana, 2009).

Within street children's environment, not every street becomes where they spend time. Some street children might gather at a site and form a typical community in some contexts. In Indonesia, street children gather at religious tourism sites such as the tombs of forefathers. One of the sites is the tomb of an Islamic saint, Sunan Gunung Jati, in Cirebon, West Java. This tomb is a religious tourism destination for Muslims, creating a new area of economic growth, mainly from tourism (Agustina et al., 2022; Faedilla & Puspitasari, 2022; Munawar et al., 2021).

One of the negative impacts is the presence of beggars who ask for money (as alms/charity) from pilgrims. Beggars travel from nearby regions to pitifully or even forcefully beg for money. A unique relationship between pilgrims and beggars around the tomb is formed through interaction management (Handriana et al., 2020). There is no hatred or conflict between them. Pilgrims are not bothered by beggars; it is as if beggars are part of a religious ritual that they cannot ignore. They even think that giving some money to beggars is part of *ibadah* (worship) and that they cannot simply leave.

Some beggars are neglected children whose parents allow them to beg at the tomb. They arrive in groups and ask for small change, and some beggars even offer to show pilgrims sacred places in exchange for some cash.

The community of street children in Cirebon Regency living around the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati is unique. These street children grow up in a religious-mystical culture, influencing how they see themselves, their roles, their environment, and the relationships among these three perspectives. For example, street children around the tomb have empathetic intelligence in explaining the mystical value of the tomb, site, and remains and the rules pilgrims must follow. It is as though they are authorities who inherited knowledge about the site through direct communication (*gethok tular*).

Groups of street children around the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati and other pilgrimage tourism sites gather money by begging, waiting for *tawur/curak*, and showing the pilgrims the tourism destinations in exchange for some cash. Those activities are equal to begging in the name of religion, as evidenced by the reports of the children who served as informants. They stated that they did not merely beg for money.

Based on the findings, their argument is accepted because most pilgrims voluntarily give them money. However, some beggars use coercive approaches at the gate of Syekh Djatul Kahfi's tomb, all the stair steps in it, and at the gate of the tomb of Gunung Djati and every surrounding alms corner.

Based on the background outlined above, this study asks the following research questions:

- What causes children to come down the street during religious rituals?
- Are economic factors and basic needs the main reasons children come down the street and beg when religious ritual events occur?
- What communication management behaviors do children use to earn money during ritual ceremonies?

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The purpose of this research is to analyze the following aspects:

- Why do children come down the street when Islamic rituals are occurring?
- The economy is the main reason why children come down the street and beg when ritual ceremonies occur.

- Children engage in communication management behaviors to earn money when the events of ritual ceremonies are occurring.

Definition and Characteristics of Street Children

The International Convention defines street children as children who spend most of their time on the streets. They socialize and travel in groups; some earn their living on the street by begging, mooching, or busking, while others steal, extort, and sell drugs.

According to Rubaida (2006), street children work on the streets. The study results indicated that street children between the ages of 7 and 15 work on the street, disrupting others' sense of calm and safety while endangering themselves. Rubaida stated that street children were always in risky situations for their physical, mental, and social development and even their life. The constant risky situations caused them to develop new values and attitudes that established violence as their means of survival. When they become adults, they tend to be agents of violence and exploit street children.

This aligns with Nurharjadm (1999) that street children are children aged 7 - 18 years old, both male and female, working on the street or in public places daily. These children are likely separated from their family, have a home but spend their time on the street, or from a family that lives on the street.

The Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia classifies street children to three categories (based on its strategic alleviation efforts for Social Welfare Problems: street children living on the street, street children working on the street, and vulnerable children becoming street children (Yuliani et al., 2022).

The Development of Children's Communication Behaviors and the Environment (Jean Piaget's Cognitive Theory and Erik Erikson's Eight Developmental Stages)

Street children are individuals in the developmental stage of childhood, i.e., between the ages of 0 and 18. The only thing that differentiates them from their counterparts of the same age is the environment, as they spend most of their time on the street, which is why they are referred to as street children (Islam et al., 2021).

Because of the complexity of the environment where street children live, these children's development is complicated and unique. Santrock and Yussen suggested that "each of us develops in certain ways like all other individuals, like some other individuals, and like no other individuals." Furthermore, they suggested that, in general, a child as an individual undergoes a holistic process of development, which comprises biological, cognitive, and psychosocial development. Yusuf (2005), using the basic approaches of Aristotle, Kretschmer, Elizabeth Hurlock, Comenius, and Rousseau, suggested that a child will undergo developmental stages based on three frameworks: biological, learning, and psychological development.

According to Hurlock, as cited in Yusuf (2005), there are five stages of a child's biological development: (1) Prenatal, from conception to birth, in approximately nine months or 280 days; (2) Infancy, from birth to the age of 10 or 14 days; (3) Babyhood, from the ages of two weeks to two years old; (4) Childhood, from the ages of two years to adolescence; and (5) Adolescence or puberty, from the ages of 11 or 13 to 21 years old.

Puberty is known to have three more specific stages: (a) Preadolescence, which generally refers to the ages of 11-14 years old for girls and somewhat later for boys; (b) Early adolescence, representing the ages of 16-17 years old; and (c) Late adolescence, which is the last step of development through the college ages (Mendle et al., 2019).

A child's growth and development are concerned with their socialization in the environment. Given that the period of perception or perceiving stimuli is related to the

potential of senses toward the environment, the internalization of values and responses is a dynamic process. Both are learning and giving influences reciprocally (Grolnick et al., 2019).

Individuals always act as learners (Fenwick & Tennant, 2020; Kaye & Bower, 1994). Thus, an individual's potential and ability will always change due to, for example, their recognition and understanding of things and, then, the decisions they make concerning what to do about the things around them. Soekanto (2004) suggested that the extent to which psychological, social, and cultural environments influence how a child grows always depends on the role of the nuclear family. In adolescence, those influences act through the peer group, especially if the role of the nuclear family has decreased due to internal conflicts.

Soekanto (2004), who identified psychological, social, and cultural factors in children's development, which are very important in determining dominant factors such that parents, school, and the environment can act appropriately, asserted that "what is important is, first, to identify good and bad influences from psychological, social, and cultural environments. Bad influences should be neutralized, while good ones should be reinforced. Then, the factors that may have positive influences should be defined. The standard is the good and proper developmental criteria for children and adolescents.

The Approach to the Construction of Meaning in Child Development

The approach to children's construction of meaning in each developmental stage has been suggested by some cognitive theorists, such as Jean Piaget, a psychologist who focused on child development. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (Desmita, 2005) describes how a child adapts and interprets objects and events, perceives the characteristics and functions of objects, learns to classify objects based on similarities and differences, understands what causes objects to change, and formulates assumptions about objects and events.

The events are systemic leaps of Piaget's explanation of child development. A particular developmental stage is an amelioration of previous stages. Every individual undergoes a series of invariant, constant qualitative changes. This happens due to biological pressure to adapt to the environment and the organization of the structure of thinking (Desmita, 2005).

As cited by Yusuf (2005) shared his view on Robert Sternberg, the cognitive process includes the three dimensions of mental capacity: thinking, the ability to deal with new problems, and the ability to adapt to situations, which indicates intelligent behavior.

Desmita (2005) summarized some arguments related to the central position of children's cognitive development in constructing meaning. The first argument is cited by Myers, who asserted that "cognition refers to all the mental activities associated with thinking, knowing, and remembering." In line with Myers, Drever suggested that cognition is a general term covering all the various modes of knowing, including perceiving, imagining, conceiving, judging, and reasoning. According to Chaplin, cognition involves the processes of children to know objects of the environment in various ways. Therefore Chaplin suggested that "cognition is a general concept that reaches all forms of knowing, including observing, watching, perception, reasoning, assuming, imagining, predicting, presuming, judgment. Traditionally, this concept is contrasted with conation and affection". The concept of cognition refers to all mental activities associated with perception, thinking, memory, and information processing that enable an individual to acquire knowledge, solve problems, and plan for the future or all psychological processes related to how an individual learns, observes, watches, imagines, makes assumptions, judges, and thinks about the environment.

Within the context of constructing meaning in child development phases, cognitive psychology views children as “actors” who actively develop knowledge about reality. Children never passively perceive external stimuli. Instead, previous experiences influence children by modifying the surrounding world, such that the interpretation of information gained takes place along the development phases over time. As Hetherington and Parke outlined in Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development (Desmita, 2005), children actively establish their knowledge about reality. Children do not passively receive information. Their experiences modify children’s processes of thinking and conception about reality. Children play an active role in interpreting the information they receive from their experiences and adapting it to their knowledge and conception of their world.

However, Piaget observed that development is gradual. Piaget formulated phases of children’s cognitive development according to the dimension of time. Every individual undergoes a series of invariant, constant qualitative changes with increasing age.

Children’s greatest development occurs when they reach the age of five to six, especially when they reach school age. According to Piaget, at this age, children’s thoughts can be labeled as concrete operational thought, the phase when children can think logically about relationships between concepts or schemes. Concrete operational thought focuses on real, concrete, or measurable objects and events (Desmita, 2005).

The previous studies mention that street children engage in various activities to earn money during religious events, such as begging and offering guiding services. However, there is a lack of detailed analysis and understanding of the motives behind these actions and the communication management behaviors employed by street children to earn money during ritual ceremonies. A comprehensive study in this area could shed light on the underlying factors driving their actions.

The research aims to understand street children’s unique situation near the tombs of Islamic saints in Indonesia and explore their communication behaviors within this cultural context. These street children face dire circumstances, including being victims of war, forced labor, abuse, and human trafficking. Among them, the population of street kids has been rapidly increasing, enduring harsh living conditions and spending up to eight hours daily wandering the streets.

The study aims to contribute to the knowledge base and offer practical implications for supporting this vulnerable population. Through a comprehensive understanding of their unique circumstances, policymakers and stakeholders can develop effective strategies to address the challenges faced by street children in this specific cultural setting.

Research Methodology

This study utilized qualitative methods, specifically interviews and participatory observation, to explore the phenomenon in the field (Busetto et al., 2020). The main data used in describing the existing situations were quotes from these interviews, allowing for a deep understanding of individuals’ experiences as subjects of a particular activity. The research was conducted at the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati in Cirebon, West Java Province, Indonesia, focusing on street children’s subjective experiences and representing their perspectives on their life on the street. The research sample was selected using a convenience sampling technique (Julia, 2022; Stratton, 2021).

The qualitative tradition employed in this study was phenomenology, which seeks to explain individuals’ lived experiences. Through interviews and participatory observation, the researchers gained valuable insights into street children’s motives and communication behaviors during religious events (Frechette et al., 2020). The data collection involved various qualitative research methods, including interviews, observations, field notes, document analysis, and ethnographic methods.

Overall, using a phenomenological approach and qualitative methods, this research aimed to comprehensively understand street children's experiences near the tombs of Islamic saints during religious events. The findings offer valuable insights for social interventions and support aimed at addressing the challenges faced by this vulnerable population.

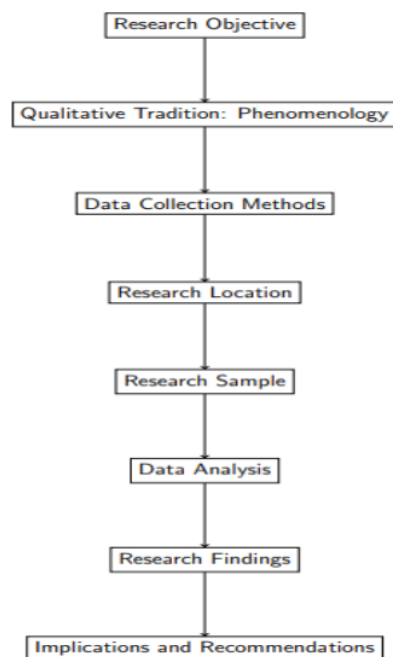


Figure 1. Research Methodology Flowchart

Flowchart Steps:

Research Objective:

Explore the communication behavior of street children during religious events.

Qualitative Tradition: Phenomenology

Data Collection Methods:

- Interviews with street children
- Participatory observation during religious events
- General observations of street children's activities
- Field notes and document analysis
- Ethnographic methods to study cultural context

Research Location: Tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati, Cirebon, West Java Province, Indonesia

Research Sample: Convenience sampling of street children near the tomb during events

Data Analysis: Transcribe and analyze interviews, observational data, and field notes

Research Findings: Identify motives and communication behaviors of street children during religious events

Implications and Recommendations: Provide insights for social interventions and support for street children

Result and Discussion

The Context of Religious Rituals: Pilgrimage Tourism and the Phenomenon of Begging Children at the Tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati

Pilgrimage tourism at the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati is so attractive that it outperforms other forms of tourism in Cirebon City and Regency. Many types of tourism warrant a visit to the area, including tourism related to the city, harbor, and coast of Cirebon, food or culinary tourism, and cultural tourism, which is no less important, such as Kraton Cirebon, Kraton Kacirebonan, Kasepuhan, and Kanoman. However, pilgrimage tourism has been the purpose of most (domestic) tourists who visit Cirebon. The Cirebon City Tourism Office stated that 88% of pilgrims are on pilgrimage (Indosiar, 2008).

The sites of pilgrimage tourism in Cirebon Regency are the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati at Astana village, the tomb of Ki Buyut Trusmi at Trusmi village, the tomb of Nyi Mas Gandasari at Panguragan village, the tomb of Syekh Ma Gelung at Karangkandal village, and the sacred tomb of Talun at Cirebon Girang village. According to the Cirebon City Tourism Office's record, most tourists on pilgrimage visit the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati, which is 20 hectares (Indosiar, 2008).

According to Basyari (1989), the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati, located at the hill of Gunung Jati, is an area that was developed into *Paguron* Islam by Syekh Idlofi Mahdi or Syekh Dzatul Kahfi or Syekh Nur Jati, who then became the teacher of Syarif Hidayatullah's father, Syarif Abdillah. At first, Syekh Idlofi Mahdi's mission was to propagate the greatness of Islam through trading. In the 1420s AD, he and his party traveled to Muara Jati harbor in Singapore (Celancang) under the Kingdom of Pajajaran. The rulers of Muara Jati, Ki Gede Surawijaya, and Ki Gede Tapa welcomed them. He was then permitted to live in Pasambangan village at Gunung Jati.

"Astana Gunung Jati" is derived from "*Settana* Gunung Jati." "*Settana*" means rigidly adhering to a tenet, as the Teacher (Syekh Nurjati) conveyed to his disciples in the statement "*Settana Iman Islam Ing Atimu*," which more or less translates to "fasten the faith of Islam in your heart, don't let it loose. Control yourself, restrain your desires, control your fiery temper" (Abdu Ghofar, n.d; p.1).

There are two pilgrimage tourism points within the area of the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati, where people hold ritual ceremonies such as praying and *kemit* addressed to the Creator. The first point is in the Gunung Sembung area, opened by Raden Walangsungsang or Pangeran (Prince) Cakrabuana. The gardens of Gunung Sembung were converted into the tomb of Pangeran Cakrabuana and Kangjeng Sunan Gunung Jati or Raden Maulana Syarif Hidayatullah, the ninth saint of Java. The second point is Gunung Jati, which was converted into the tomb of Syekh Dzatul Kahfi. Over time, the area of Gunung Jati and Gunung Sembung, which was originally the Center of Islamic Studies, has become the center of worship and religious tourism or pilgrimage tourism.

According to Abdu Ghofar Abu Nidallah, the sacred times and events for praying at the sites are as follows: Muludan and Malam Pelal, Syawalan or Grebeg Syawal (welcoming Syawal), Serenan, Sedekah Bumi/Nadran, and Kliwonan (eve of Friday Kliwon). Some of the ceremonies are associated with the phenomenon of poverty and the poor's begging behavior (*dhu'afa*). The beggars, some of whom are children, exploit or take advantage of pilgrims and tomb keepers to earn money.

Although the number of children and adults begging is large daily, the number is even greater during sacred times and events. Below, some aspects of the ritual events related to the presence of children who beg at the tomb are presented.

Muludan or Maulidan is the observance of the birthday of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, which occurs on Rabi' al-Awwal (Rabi' I) 12th. In Gunung Jati, Muludan on Rabi' al-Awwal (Rabi' I) 12th is also named Malam Pelal (eve of Pelal). According to Abdu

Ghofar, Pelal is an assimilation of the word “*fadhal*” or “*afdhal*,” translated as superior/excellence (Abdu Ghofar, n.d; p.33).

In the tradition of *Kacirebonan*, the essence of Malam Pelal involves the recitation of Maulid Deibe’i and the Procession of Panjang Jimat. The recitation of Maulid Deibe’i includes lines of prose on the history of Prophet Muhammad by the elders, public figures of Gunung Jati, Islamic disciples (*santri*), and commoners. Panjang Jimat is a procession of symbols that takes place in Pesembangan, from the residence of Jeneng to Pasembangan, and Maulid Deibe’i is recited during the procession. This event attracts attention, including street children who attempt to earn money and hope to receive “gifts” through the procession. The meaning behind this procession is that one value must be preserved and kept, along with the word “*jimat*,” which stands for “*Siji sing kedah dirumat*” (one we have to preserve).

One of the most anticipated things during Malam Pelal is Brekat Pelal. Brekat is derived from “*berkah*” or “*barokah*” (gifts, favors, blessings), which refers to the blessings on the eve of Mawlid—a type of food that symbolizes the construction of meaning, Ketan Rasul. The symbol of food made from sticky rice (ketan) should not be interpreted as “humiliating” the attribute of the Prophet; instead, it should be interpreted as a bound of tenet brought by Rasulullah Muhammad PBUH.

Grebeg Syawal or Syawalan is an event that occurs after the fasting month of Ramadan. Muslims celebrate the day of victory by visiting friends and family to ask for forgiveness. For people around the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati, the month of Syawal is associated with the rite of “Grebeg Syawal,” which is held by the royal families of Kraton Kanoman and Kasepuhan Cirebon. However, the two families hold the rite at different periods. Thousands of people and pilgrims participate in this tradition, causing congestion on the roads of Pantura (northern coast) between Klayan and Celancang.

Grebeg Syawal is, in essence, a pilgrimage rite of the royal family of Kraton Cirebon. In this rite, the family members visit the graves of their forefathers while greeting people. The royal family offers prayers and places flowers on the graves, particularly the tomb of Syarif Hidayatullah and the Sultan (Kings) of Kanoman. After visiting the graves, the party typically tosses coins to people experiencing poverty and beggars flooding the area around Astana Gunung Jati. This tossing of coins is known as “*Curak*” or “*Sawer*” by the people of Cirebon (Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kota Cirebon, 2022).

Sawer or *curak* is not exclusively done by the royal family; members of any level of society and pilgrims may participate. People’s motive for giving money and happiness, such as by *sawer* or *curak*, is to earn greater fortune and happiness by granting their prayers or wishes. The tradition of *sawer* and *curak* drives people to experience poverty and beg children to beg around the tomb. This tradition of *sawer* is often associated with a mandate from Kangjeng Sunan Gunung Jati, “*Ingsun Titip Tajug Ian Fakir Miskin*” (I entrust you with the mosque/*tajug*/prayer-house (*surau*) and the poor). *Titip tajug* means that we should always pray, and *fakir miskin* means that we should spare some money or give alms to people experiencing poverty.

Serenan is derived from the word “*seren*” in Javanese, and the two terms have the same meaning of descending from a higher into an original position. Regarding the process of visiting the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati, Serenan refers to the activities performed by the keepers (*wong kemit* or *wong kraman*) around the tomb area of Gunung Sembung, where Sunan Gunung Jati is buried, in handing over the duty, obligation, and authority of keeping the tomb to the group of *wong kemit* that starts its duties the next day. Every group of *wong kemit* contains 12 people with a tomb-keeping job during a rotation that lasts for fifteen days. Bekel Sepuh and Bekel Anom command them.

On the fifteenth day, they performed seren of duty to the next group through the ritual of reciting *tahlil* at Gedong Jinem, where Kangjeng Sunan was buried. After the ritual, they perform *curak*, tossing coins to the begging children waiting around *Paseban Soko*. This is

done to show gratitude for the duty being done well. People express gratefulness by *curak* not only around the tomb but also along the way to their homes.

Abdul Ghofar stated that *Wong Kemit* performed *curak* as a good deed to purify their earnings. He made the following statement concerning this matter:

"For Wong Kemit, this is the essence of Sidkah or zakat of earnings (a type of tithe), that in some of the earnings, there is a share for the poor." (Abdu Ghofar, n.d; p.40)

Based on his observation, Syahroni suggested that *tawurji* or *curak* after *serenan* by *Wong Kemit* is a custom that encourages children to learn socially about begging. In detail, Syahroni asserted the following:

"The customs or habits in society raise the existence of begging, including the tradition at the sacred tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati, known as 'tawurji,' a ritual after 'serenan.'"

Kliwonan is a tradition on Friday Kliwon, which has been observed since the era of Kanjeng Sunan. In the era of Kanjeng Sunan, Kliwonan was used as a time for *adipati* (governors) and *bupati* (regents) under the rule of Kesultanan Gunung Jati to report for duty. Sunardjo in Abdul Ghofar (n.d: p.43) outlined the origin of this tradition as follows:

The Gegeden and authorities in Kraton brought guards and relatives to accompany them and visit the royal family of Kraton Pakungwati. It caused some crowds. People who wanted to see or were merely curious about or admired the appearance of their leader. This event, finally, resulted in a new tradition, the tradition of Seba Kliwonan.

For people around the tomb and pilgrims, the tradition of Seba Kliwonan at Friday Kliwon is a form of positive response to the following utterance of the Prophet: *sayyidul ayyam wa hijjul fuqoro wa 'iedul masakin*. This statement indicates that Friday is the superior day to perform the pilgrimage (*haji*) for *faqir* (the poor) and the holy day for *masakin* (the needy). However, there have been deviations to the ritual, which was originally full of values and sacred beliefs, including the presence of beggars from Cirebon and other regions, searching for a mate, and covert prostitution.

If we ask the beggars, children and adults, Friday Kliwon is the most awaited time because of the many pilgrims, which correlates with their earnings. As Rizal, one of the children who was considered a senior and the most capable in waiting for *tawur* around "*watu tameng*," said:

"On Friday Kliwon, there is not enough time to do other activities besides waiting for tawur from pilgrims, and many people visit the tomb. If you'd like to see me and my friends, please not on the eve of kliwon...please find other days" (Interview with Rizal, January 9th, 2008)

From the point of view of beggars and begging children, important days for earning money, from *tawurji*, alms, and begging, are a top priority. However, they beg daily, including days unrelated to religious tradition. Generally, they spend their time at the tomb of Gunung Jati. The site has become part of their life and a place where they attempt to earn money for living expenses from pilgrims every day.

The Phenomenon of Street Children at Gunung Jati: Economic Motive, Habit, and Myth

If we ask the children around the tomb of Gunung Jati the question, "Why do you come down on the street? Why do you beg? And what do you use your earnings for?" most of them provide the same answer. They come down on the pilgrimage area to earn a living by begging with the phrase "*wur... wur... wur... tawurji... tawur... tawur... selamat dawa umur*". *Wur* is the short form of *tawur*, meaning "just throw it or scatter it" if it is difficult for pilgrims to share with them equally. *Selamat dawa umur* refers to praise and prayer for anyone who scatters coins to live a long life.

It is easy to guess what happens next: frenzies, chaos, and fights over coins scattered by pilgrims. Fifty or a hundred rupiahs are the lowest denominations of money that they most often receive. However, the kind-hearted pilgrims typically throw them one or two thousand rupiahs.

The street children who beg at the tomb on Sunan Gunung Jati are their family's source of living; thus, what are local people's opinions of street children? Most of them said that street children are poor children who their family left to earn a living, sluggards, and already causing chaos around the tomb. However, some elders believe that children are viewed as "*jejadian*" (supernatural beings in human-like form) in charge of protecting the tomb.

However, regarding security and order, the stigma of street children as scum who frequently engage in violence and cause discomfort does not appear in people's perception of begging children around the tomb. Mr. Sya'ari explained that people do not feel disturbed by the presence of the children, although people are more pleased with their absence because it is more convenient if the pilgrimage is not disturbed by their presence. Furthermore, he asserted that:

"Children sit around waiting for coins to be thrown; even so, they never cause trouble or crimes... I'd like to have the site free from those children... but what can I say? It has become a habit since long ago; moreover, there are so many poor people around here... we never ban them, we leave it as long as they do not commit crimes" (Interview with Mr. Sya'ari, op cit).

Meanwhile, according to Mr. Usup (70 years old), the keeper of Syek Djatul Kahfi's tomb, the children's presence does not disturb the pilgrimage atmosphere. Although they often fight with each other, they never cause trouble. Mr. Usup considers that living is in the hands of the Almighty, and there is no need to fuss. It is necessary to consider that they are the children of the working poor.

"Urusan rejeki dewek-dewekan, kadang-kadang oli ana rejekine, kadang beli oli rejekine" (Interview with Mr. Yusup, December 25th, 2007).

However, the positive and neutral opinions about street children around the tomb of Gunung Jati differ from the opinions of public figures within the area of the tomb. Mr. Satori (55 years old) is an outside officer whom pilgrims often visit. He is the person to whom people address questions about Sunan Gunung Jati. Mr. Satori is Bekel Luar, which he inherited from his parents.

According to him, the street children around the tomb come from the village and neighboring villages around the tomb of Gunung Jati. Occasionally, the number increases, along with the new sites found, such as Lemah Tambak, with its seven wells considered as "*petilasan*," or remains from *kanjeng* Sunan.

At first, their parents are wealthy. When pilgrims visit, they get *sawer* or alms. This activity of pilgrims throwing coins has become a habit, resulting in people becoming “*ketagian*” (addicted) to easy money. Given the opportunity to obtain easy money, parents let their children beg for alms. Mr. Satori concluded that those factors caused parents to become too lazy to work or to farm.

The presence of street children around the tomb is also associated with myths. People around the tomb have their interpretation of begging. Begging, as committed by street children, is a symbol, a philosophy that began long ago. According to some people, the relationship between beggars and almsgivers is similar to the relationship between creatures and the Creator, such as humans and God.

People interpret the symbol as follows: humans who ask for something from the Almighty should act as “beggars.” According to Syahroni, bowing, wishing, and fatefully submitting to the giver or ruler, who is never fed up or exasperated with human behavior, is misleading. In this view, begging reflects the Creator’s awareness of human existence. If it is misinterpreted, unknown, or intentionally forgotten, people would never forbid their children to beg and would never question the good or the bad; only public figures would dare to acknowledge the existence of the belief regarding the symbolization.

In addition to the interpretation of the phenomenon of “begging” around the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati, there is a myth related to the presence of street children at Astana Village.

It is said that once upon a time, in the period of colonization by the Dutch and Japanese, a kid saved Astana Village, the location of the sacred tomb. The colonial troops fled without even fighting after they saw the kid and canceled the establishment of a fortress there.

In place of the kid (who repelled the colonial troops), other children came to the tomb and asked for alms from pilgrims.

Meanwhile, according to Mr. Usup, the myth related to children at Gunung Djati differs from that suggested by Syahroni. Children who beg at Gunung Djati are associated with the missing monkeys that once appeared at the tomb. Are the children replacing the monkeys, or are the monkeys transformed into children? Indeed, it is a myth associated with children who need to be preserved, even though their presence is occasionally considered intrusive.

Communication Behavior of Begging Children at the Tomb of Gunung Jati, Cirebon Regency

Communication behavior is the basic essence of human life. Every step a man takes within a social process is associated with the communication attached (Ellis, 2019). Whenever people join an organization, conflict with people outside their group, plan a program, and deliver it to others, they communicate following the need and the context (Levi & Askay, 2020).

The same is true for the children’s communication during various daily activities, including those around the pilgrimage tourism sites (Amaro et al., 2021). It has been described that begging children are involved in the social process within the community of pilgrimage tourism by delivering messages about begging to the pilgrims. As children’s daily activity, begging has resulted in unique communication behaviors.

If considered from the view of *khusyuk* (complete concentration) in *ziarah*, those behaviors annoy visitors and keepers. For the pilgrims, it is unpleasant and troublesome to have beggars hindering their way to every corner of the site. At the same time, it is troublesome for the keepers to maintain the orderliness, convenience, and cleanliness of the place used for worship. Thus, there is a clash of interests between people who want to worship the Almighty and the people and children who take advantage of them. Pilgrims

complete their pilgrimage by giving their earnings to needy children, and the children take advantage of the pilgrims' intention to complete their worship through almsgiving.

The situation becomes complicated and complex because, on special occasions, many pilgrims visit the tomb. The increasing number of pilgrims, street vendors, and beggars are also increasing. In fact, according to some people and local street children, the beggars are not only from nearby locations or villages but also from outside of the regency/city or province.

Similarly, on those special occasions, the beggars and begging street children work much longer. If they work at noon or up to six o'clock in the afternoon daily, then on those special occasions, they might beg until the next dawn/morning. Moreover, mob fights and chaos for alms from pilgrims intensified because of the large number of beggars. However, some children stated that their earnings increase on those special occasions. If they only earn five to ten thousand rupiahs daily, then on those special occasions, they can earn up to twenty or thirty thousand rupiahs.

Those circumstances influence the communication behaviors of the children who beg. For example, they are willing to spend more time communicating on the road than they spend daily. If they interact on the road only until six o'clock in the afternoon, then on those days, they socialize with others on the road for more than eight hours. If they interact intensively with only five to ten pilgrims, then on those special occasions, they may reach up to thirty or forty pilgrims for each child. As a result, the children spend more energy on communication-related to begging.

From the perspective of meeting basic human needs, begging is less accepted by social norms and rules, although there is no serious sanction. However, we argue that there is a higher motive than simply meeting basic needs such as food. It is seen that some of the children, although their parents are jobless, still have a home and family, and some are not even from low-income families. Those children try to meet their secondary or even tertiary needs. Their earnings are not merely spent on basic needs but on cigarettes, gambling (betting money on a game), and IT goods. It is common for children to carry a cell phone while begging and "texting" each other. When they are asked about the function of cell phones for them, they state that they use them to socialize through texting (SMS). Those answers show the motives of self-actualization.

In the next section, we will specifically discuss the communication behaviors of street children and their constituents. In other words, street children's communication behaviors with their parents, pilgrims, keepers of the tomb, begging adults, their fellow begging children, and their schoolmates. Compared with street children's communication while begging, their communication with school and teachers does not stand out because those children lack interest and enthusiasm about discussing communication with their teachers. This indicates the low intensity of communication with teachers, despite most begging street children being in school.

The Structuring of Communication with Pilgrims/Visitors

Communication with the pilgrims is the most intense communication that the children engage in. They structure their communication so the pilgrims are willing to give them alms. Children can structure the type of communication by selecting verbal and non-verbal messages, so pilgrims feel that they need to give the children alms (Jackson, 2019).

In terms of verbal messages, children have standard vocabularies (words), structures of sentences, and contents of messages they deliver to pilgrims to elicit positive and supportive attitudes toward those children. An example is words with the following sentence structure and content: "*Pa, sedekah, Pa!*" ("Sir, spare us, Sir!"). This sentence is one that children most often utter to persuade the pilgrims or visitors to spare them coins. This type of verbal message is typically amplified by or attached to non-verbal messages so visitors respond. These non-verbal messages may include opening one's hand upward,

pulling the pilgrims' clothes, and following the visitors to the place of worship. These behaviors are done mostly by begging children, but smaller beggars mostly do such structuring of messages. Their approach is simple and straight to the point. For example, Wahyudin and Melisa engage in these behaviors. Melisa typically utters words such as:

"Nyisun dikasih duit sewu, Pa, Bu" (Please spare us one thousand rupiahs, Sir, Mam) (Interview with Melisa, op cit).

While Wahyudin typically says the following to visitors:

"Cepet-cepetan, Pa sedekah Pa, amal Pa!" (Hurry, Sir, spare us, Sir!) (Interview with Melisa, op cit).

More adult children have more organized and varied communication behavior and attempt to establish an influence by giving information to visitors. They do not merely ask for alms; rather, they try to convince the visitors to give them money for blessings, sacredness, and services that they can provide to visitors.

The aspects listed below describe children's communication behaviors with the visitors.

Avoid asking forcefully

Asking forcefully is the communication behavior that children most avoid (Bajari & Kuswarno, 2020). The observation results also indicate that children do not behave aggressively when approaching pilgrims. However, the behavior of following pilgrims is considered an intervention that makes pilgrimage convenient.

Thus, principally, begging, offering to show pilgrims around, and asking for *curak* or *tawur* in front of Watu Tameng should be done appropriately. The children should not act aggressively or force visitors to give them alms.

Prepare a Nice Title for Pilgrims

Another way that children draw pilgrims' attention to give them alms is by calling the pilgrims nice titles. They typically call the pilgrims "Bu Haji" for women and "Pa Haji" for men (*Haji* = Hajj), even though the pilgrims have never completed Hajj to Mecca. In Islam, hajji is a title of honor and represents high status.

Try to "Sell" the Sacred Image of the Pilgrimage Site

Children also establish communication with the visitors by convincing pilgrims of the sacredness of objects or places of pilgrimage. They try to construct their perception of an object's efficacy and mystical wonders, such as the stones and water at Watu Tameng and Seven Wells. The mysticism constructed by children is learned through myths that elders verbalize and communicate to other people/pilgrims so that they would believe it. For children, success is related to the amount of money they receive from pilgrims.

Ahmad, for example, said that if a pilgrim takes a stone and gives alms, he will succeed in his work and not have bad luck. This story is told to visitors who take a stone at Tameng.

They throw coins for some reason. For example, a business person would want to sell well; a driver would want his safety and be saved from bad luck. People say they need to throw coins (*sawer*).

"Sawer is for getting a blessing: Businessman, driver, and school graduate. High school students want to graduate, and junior high school students want to graduate; if they graduate, they should be suwun. Suwun means to be grateful" (Interview with Ahmad, op cit.)

Pilgrims never feel disturbed or annoyed by children's initiative in telling stories or myths. They do not mind or get upset. They believe these stories are for their safety, business, or preparation.

"For example, Karim, when nameng, typically attempts to convince visitors of the efficacy of a stone of tameng by saying, 'Bu, batunya bu dibawa bu, biar sehat, rejekinya lancar. Kaluarganya panjang umur Pa Haji, Bu Haji' (Mam, here is the stone, mam, just take it. It is for your health, well earnings, for the long life of your family, Mrs. Haji, Mr. Haji)." (Interview with Mukarim, op cit.)

Consider Visitors as People Who Are Willing to Give Alms

Another important aspect in building children's courage in asking for alms is their perception of and positive attitudes toward pilgrims. When establishing effective and harmonic communication, it is important to have positive thoughts and attitudes. Participants in the communication are not burdened by fear or awkwardness in conveying something to their communication partner.

Children's attitudes toward all pilgrims evidence this; they think pilgrims will always give them alms sincerely and in good manners. That is one of their positive thoughts or attitudes. By having positive thoughts and attitudes, children never choose whom they request or do not request money from. Thus, if they have an unpleasant experience with some pilgrims, for example, they do not receive small change, they will not feel disappointed and immediately find other pilgrims.

One of the positive attitudes of children was reported by Sidik. Sidik always believes that pilgrims are charitable and always have some small change in their pockets to spare. For example, he stated that:

"Approach them; they come here to do good deeds and surely bring some small change to spare. If they want, they can throw coins. Some even ask us to show them around." (Interview with Mukarim, op cit.)

Iim stated that the good intention of pilgrims is seen as a habit. Pilgrims come to the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati to *tawur* (throw coins) so that they will have good earnings. Specifically, he said:

"Nameng mintanya, Tawur Pa Tawur, biar rejekinya lancar. Mereka udah biasa, tau kita minta ditawur" (They are already familiar with it, they know we ask them for tawur)." (Interview with Muhammad Imron, op cit.)

The foundation of Aceng's positive thoughts and attitudes is that he does not want to disturb the pilgrims. He would not force pilgrims to give him money. Therefore, Aceng feels certain that because the children are not being forceful, pilgrims would never become tired of or upset with them even if they keep asking for alms.

7

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We ask pilgrims by saying, Sir, spare us, Sir, spare us, Sir, *tawur*, please, so your prayer will be granted happiness for some blessing. But we never force them, follow them. If they insist on not giving to us, never mind, we don't want to disturb them.

They are not angry. Well, they are here to pray and, at the same time, to do good deeds so their prayer will be granted. Thus, they are just fine; we never insist too.

Conclusion

Sacred events characterized by worship, namely, Muludan and Malam Pelal, Syawalan or Grebeg Syawal (welcoming Syawal), Serenan, Sedekah Bumi/Nadran, and Kliwonan (eve of Friday Kliwon), are the peak times at which street children beg. The ceremony or ritual concerns the phenomenon of poverty and children's begging behavior.

Street children have some networking communication established through their communication with their community, including their parents, tomb keepers, pilgrims, begging adults, senior beggars, and peer groups.

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