

***Macan Ali*: A symbol of Acculturation between Islam and Javanese Mysticism in Cirebon**

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Abstract

This article explores the practice of symbolization, investigating how flags acquire specific characteristics that enable their use as symbols. The main objective of this study is to describe the *Macan Ali* flag, with a particular focus on its connection to mysticism and Islam within the context of Javanese culture, specifically in Cirebon. This study reveals that the *Macan Ali*, when viewed as a symbol, can be interpreted as a concept that manifests as an entity embodying logical-analytical qualities. A comprehensive understanding of the philosophy of symbols allows for the harmonious integration of literal and figurative meanings within the *Macan Ali* symbol. Furthermore, it plays a pivotal role in harmonizing the two distinct concepts of Javanese mysticism and Islam. This synthesis underscores the multifaceted nature of symbols and their capacity to bridge diverse cultural and religious paradigms.

Keywords: *Javanese Mysticism, Islam, Symbols, Macan Ali*

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas praktik simbolisasi, yang menjelaskan bagaimana bendera mengambil karakteristik tertentu untuk digunakan sebagai simbol. Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan bendera Macan Ali, dengan fokus khusus pada hubungannya dengan mistisisme dan Islam dalam konteks budaya Jawa, khususnya di Cirebon. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Macan Ali, ketika dilihat sebagai simbol, dapat ditafsirkan sebagai konsep yang berwujud sebagai entitas yang mencakup kualitas logis-analitis. Pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang filosofi simbol memungkinkan integrasi yang harmonis antara makna harfiah dan figuratif dalam simbol Macan Ali. Selain itu, simbol ini memainkan peran penting dalam menyelaraskan dua konsep yang berbeda dari mistisisme Jawa dan Islam. Pemahaman ini menunjukkan sifat multifaset dari simbol untuk menjembatani paradigma budaya dan agama yang beragam.

Kata Kunci: *Mistisisme Jawa, Islam, Simbol, Macan Ali*

Introduction

From a sociological perspective, religion serves to legitimize or inspire various forms of social life (Canetti-Nisim, 2003). It is therefore crucial to perceive religion as a lens through which we comprehend the construction of reality by human beings as a social group. This approach prevents a narrow interpretation of religion that solely differentiates between sacred and profane elements (Daniels, 2016). As such, religion can be comprehended through the anthropological theory that it is a system of symbols rooted in mystical concepts (Stark & Bainbridge, 1996). Within this framework, religious ideas and symbols serve as tools to achieve various objectives, one of which pertains to mystical concepts.

Islam, as a religion, is not a singular, unvarying entity with a limited set of doctrines and practices. It is, instead, a complex and diverse system of beliefs that, while sharing foundational tenets, doctrines, and symbols, is subject to interpretation and adaptation based on

geographical and cultural contexts. This inherent flexibility and adaptability of Islam have been key to its integration into various societies and cultures worldwide. In the context of Javanese societies, this adaptability has been particularly evident. The interpretation and practice of Islam in these societies have been shaped not just by the foundational Islamic beliefs, but also by the pre-existing socio-cultural fabric of the Javanese societies. This has led to a unique form of Islam that, while rooted in the core Islamic doctrines, also reflects the local traditions and customs of Java, including mysticism.

Mysticism in religion originates from cosmogonic and eschatological belief systems associated with the notions of God, the universe and humanity. In a religious context, mystical perspectives come into play when human rationality fails to comprehend reality (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997). The mystical paradigm possesses two distinct characteristics. Firstly, it does not manifest in everyday life. Secondly, it represents phenomena that transcend human rationality but bear phenomenological resemblances to both culture and religion (Vöröš, 2013). The term “mysticism” elicits a broad spectrum of emotions and thoughts among philosophers (Akhilananda, 1948). From an anthropological viewpoint, mysticism is a subsystem present in nearly all religious systems, fulfilling the human desire for a connection with God (McKim, 2001). Therefore, mysticism is a belief ingrained in the collective human consciousness (Jones, 2022).

The mystical world has been an integral part of Javanese society since its inception and continues to be passed down through generations (Suyono, 2007). Javanese mystical concepts lean more

towards the occult, relying on supernatural forces to cater to human needs through intuition rather than intellect. That is to say, the Javanese mystical concept is not only based on the theological basis but also on the theosophical foundation (Endraswara, 2018).

In the religious context, Javanese culture is closely tied to syncretic views (Jha, 2022). Syncretism, a fusion of different beliefs or practices, has been adopted by the Javanese as a foundation for communal living and the revitalization of religious life (Beatty, 1999). Jochem van den Boogert, in his research on Javanese mystical culture, posits that Islamic culture in Java represents a syncretism of religious perspectives and local culture. Consequently, Islam in Java manifests as a religious phenomenon imbued with mystical traditions (Boogert, 2015). Islamic mysticism in Java is a unique culture that formulates concepts and teachings of ontology and general metaphysics, encompassing theology, anthropology, metaphysics and cosmology. This mystical culture gave rise to the belief in the *Macan* (tiger)¹ as a sacred mystical creature in Islam in Java. However, it is essential to approach syncretism in a transformative and innovative manner within both religious and cultural contexts. This approach helps avoid confusion, as the interpretation of syncretism is invariably linked to historical, cultural, social, and political contexts (Leopold & Jensen, 2014).

In religious and cultural systems, such as those of the Javanese, symbols or signs play a crucial role. They serve as a medium to express concepts that are complex and cannot be adequately articulated through words alone. The use of symbols is not a random or meaningless act; rather, it is a deliberate effort to encapsulate and convey a discernible meaning (Ferguson, 1976). Symbols can

embody religious experiences, serving as tangible representations of abstract spiritual phenomena. They act as a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms, providing a means for individuals to connect with and understand religious concepts and experiences. Deciphering the meaning behind a symbol, such as that on a flag, can offer valuable insights. It can shed light on the religious practices, experiences, and understanding of the people who revere this symbol. This process of interpretation can reveal the underlying beliefs, values, and traditions of the community, providing a deeper understanding of their religiosity.

In Javanese culture, symbols are deeply intertwined with their religious and cultural practices. They serve as a reflection of the community's shared beliefs and values, contributing to the richness and diversity of their cultural heritage. Therefore, the study and interpretation of these symbols can provide a unique perspective on the Javanese religious and cultural systems, enhancing our understanding of their complex and vibrant socio-cultural fabric.

This study aims to analyze the symbol of the tiger in the Macan Ali Flag and its association with mysticism and Islam in Javanese culture, particularly in Cirebon. Understanding the Macan Ali flag necessitates a comprehension of the interplay between the assumed reality of Javanese culture and the symbolized mystical views. In this context, the tiger symbol (*Macan*) serves to bridge these two aspects.

Literature Review

Dillistone posits that the term 'symbol' originates from the Greek word 'symbollein', which translates to 'to match'. Initially, a symbol

was an object, sign, or word used to denote a corresponding or ‘matching’ symbola (Dillistone, 1986). The figurative use of symbols stems from the practice of breaking clay pots to signify the conclusion of a contract or agreement. Each party retains a piece of the pot, enabling them to reconstruct the original object in case of a dispute. These pieces, known as symbols, represent not only something else but also point towards an absent element necessary for completion or wholeness (Hill, 1985; O’Connell & Airey, 2009).

Flags, as material cultural artifacts, are originated from practical human activities. They possess symbolic functions and are associated with diverse backgrounds in philosophy and social sciences. A flag transcends mere imagery; it can visually evoke ideological, historical, socio-political or cultural representations or perceptions, linking the past with the present. The symbolic nature of a flag engenders various forms of imagination and memory. Consequently, the interpretation of a flag is contingent on evolving historical, social, and cultural conditions (Jewett & Collora, 1995).

Flags are potent symbols capable of fostering unity within a community or engendering division between rivals. Beyond their overt symbolic representation, flags tap into our evolved cognitive predisposition towards social intelligence. A.P. Fiske’s relational model of sociality elucidates why flag-raising can readily incite group bonding and discomfort in response to adversarial challenges. Flags stimulate evolved aspects of our social cognition that operate along two distinct orientations. Firstly, in alignment with Durkheim’s emphasis, flag-raising invokes cognitive frameworks of egalitarianism and social solidarity, a framework Fiske terms “communal sharing”. Secondly, flag-raising triggers a cognitive

framework associated with social ontologies of rank and dominance behavior, which Fiske labels “authority ranking”. According to Fiske, the capacity to oscillate between these perspectives is integral to social functioning (Fiske, 1992).

The mystical value of a flag is intertwined with a mythological narrative, projecting its meaning into the past despite the lack of continuity between modern and medieval interpretations. The origins of its mythological understanding hark back to antiquity, or in Mircea Eliade’s terminology, *in illo tempore* (Jaskulowski, 2016). The central position of the flag as a symbol is closely linked to a magical mode of thinking, which is a modern phenomenon rather than a primitive one. The magical potency of flags is predicated on the interplay between two ontological domains: symbolic-metaphoric and metonymic-causal.

Flags often employ animal symbols, necessitating an exploration of the narratives, expositions and uncertainties that intermittently emerge in the diverse portrayals of these creatures. This exploration aims to understand how past events, memories and Islamic beliefs intersect within the realm of animal symbol representations. The use of an animal symbol serves as a medium through which social imaginaries (and their corresponding ideologies) are presented in ways that are devoid of political context or portrayed as natural. It constitutes a valuable repository of historical and spiritual knowledge, offering insights into the current position of communities in relation to their past (Hao, 2019).

In the Javanese paradigm, mystical perspectives are influenced by pre-Islamic Javanese culture, such as beliefs about predicting future events, including the interpretation of symbols (Endraswara, 2018).

This observation forms the basis for asserting that, sociologically, the concept of mysticism in religion constitutes a specific behavior that can be institutionalized as a belief system (Malinowski, 1948).

Javanese mysticism espouses a universal teaching of monotheism (belief in one God). Mysticism represents the zenith of a profound understanding of religion. Javanese Spiritualists comprehend that every religion imparts truth and acknowledges the existence of a singular deity. Islamic mysticism shares similarities with pre-existing beliefs in Java, facilitating its acceptance within the region. This has led to the understanding that Java is a composite of Hindu-Buddhism and Islamic mysticism.

This understanding of pre-Islamic influence suggests an accommodating process of acculturation. Accommodation is a temporary resolution of differences aimed at reducing conflict, which can be viewed from two aspects: as a situation and as a process. Accommodation as a condition refers to a balance in the process of interaction, both between individuals and between groups and cultures (Rouček & Warren, 1965). Accommodation as a process is an attempt to defuse conflict to achieve balance. Other terms often used in conjunction with accommodation include adaptation, which is a process by which living organisms adjust to their environment, and assimilation, a process by which two or more distinct groups gradually develop new patterns of attitudes derived from the attitudes of each group.

The acculturation of Islam with local traditions in Java is classified as accommodated acculturation, which is acculturation capable of adapting from one culture to another with minimal conflict. This concept of acculturation forms the basis for analyzing the

relationship between Javanese mysticism and Islam, especially in understanding *Macan Ali* as a symbol.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative-descriptive approach, which involved an in-depth exploration and detailed description of the problem at hand. This approach was then combined with interpretive research, which leverages symbol theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

In the interpretive stage, researchers examined the phenomenon under study through the lens of an acculturation approach. Acculturation refers to the process where two distinct cultures merge to form a new culture, without eliminating the original elements of each culture. This approach is particularly useful in understanding the dynamics of cultural integration and transformation. Applying this approach to the study allowed the researchers to identify and understand the existence of pre-Islamic elements that have been acculturated from various other cultures. It provided insights into how these elements have been preserved and integrated into the new culture, contributing to its unique identity.

Furthermore, the acculturation approach enabled the researchers to delve into the purpose and meaning of the existence of these pre-Islamic elements in the current cultural context. It facilitated a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of these elements and their role in shaping the cultural and religious practices of the society.

Result and Discussion

About *Macan Ali* flag

Flags have long been used as a symbolic tool to convey meaning and to identify a particular group or region (Gitlin, 2006). For example, the flag of the cross is used to symbolize the holy mission of Christianity to represent of the Holy Spirit for Christian warriors (Coski, 2006). This was also the case in Cirebon, which had a banner called "*Macan Ali*" as its war flag with the tiger symbol.

Visually, *Macan Ali* is a symbol of the greatness of the Sultanate of Cirebon. In Prince Wangsatarta's script, *Macan Ali* is a flag called "*kad kacana singa baruang dwajalula*" with the tiger emblem. But when Prince Sulaiman Sulendraningrat was appointed by Sultan Sepuh and Sultan Kanoman Cirebon as the person in charge of history, he wrote the book "*Babad Tanah Sunda/Babad Cirebon*" and mentioned that the flag of Cirebon with the name "*Macan Ali*" (Sudiana, 2014).



Figure 1 Macan Ali Flag

Macan Ali is the flag of the Sultanate of Cirebon, which is also a war flag carried by Fatahillah during the conquest of Batavia between 1511-1526. The historical event was then commemorated in a stamp officially issued by PT POS Indonesia in 2008. After Fatahillah was

recalled to Cirebon in 1598 to replace the deceased Sunan Gunung Jati, the flag was brought back to Cirebon (Sudiana, 2014).



Figure 2 Stamp by PT POS Indonesia in 2008 with Flag of Macan Ali (left side)

The existence of the Macan Ali flag is often associated with the mystical realm. Many said that the flag was lent to the Mangkunegaran Palace to ward off bad luck. While at the Mangkunegaran Palace, the Macan Ali flag was confiscated by the Colonial Government because it was considered dangerous. However, before it was confiscated, the Mangkunegaran Palace managed to make a duplicate of the flag (Bambang, 2012).

Understanding the Meaning of Macan in Javanese Culture

Human societies have long held a profound reverence for the tiger, recognizing its characteristics and creating strategies to conquer and capture it. This reverence extends to both material possessions and spiritual ideologies, forming aesthetic opinions about the tiger and generating numerous myths related to it. The worship and symbolism of the tiger serve as the focal point of these cultural pursuits. These beliefs about the tiger have been widespread in early civilizations and have continued into modern times, including in the Sultanate of Cirebon.

The Sultanate of Cirebon is a kingdom located in the northern part of the island of Java, precisely on the border between West Java and East Java. Founded by Syarif Hidayatullah, also known as Sunan

Heritage of Nusantara:

Gunung Jati, the Sultanate of Cirebon was renowned for its role as a promoter of Islam in Majalengka, Kuningan, and Banten during Syarif Hidayatullah's leadership. Despite the Sultanate of Cirebon officially coming to an end in 1926 when it was abolished by the Dutch colonial government in Cirebon, the symbolism represented by its flag with tiger did not completely fade away with the formal cessation of the place (Abimanyu, 2014).

Historically, tigers (or *Macan* in Javanese language) have been widely used as a symbol in various beliefs, one of which is the Nakhi. In Nakhi culture, a living or dying tiger is a sacred animal that is perfect and dignified (Gengsheng, 2001). Therefore, tigers are considered to represent ancestral spirits. Whereas in India, the tiger is a symbol of strength and a symbol of the royal family (Brittlebank, 1995). In Javanese culture, however, tigers have been regarded as sacred animals since before the arrival of Islam. Tigers are also believed to be the incarnation of ancestral spirits whose duty it is to guard (Boomgaard, 2001), including in Cirebon. These beliefs were influenced by pre-Islamic and Hindu cultures. As in the oral tradition of the people of Cirebon, there is a belief in tigers, influenced by the belief in Prabu Siliwangi (Wessing, 1993).

The interaction between humans and tigers in Java, particularly in Cirebon, has a long history. On 29 March 1817, the Colonial Government in Cirebon officially offered a reward of 12 Guldens for a captured tiger, either alive or dead. This practice of offering rewards for tiger catchers and killers has been carried out by the Colonial Government since around 1747 (Boomgaard, 2001). In fact, a German VOC superintendent in charge of the Gebang-Cirebon area hired a 'dukun macan' as his personal bodyguard to

accompany him when he was out on duty. Additionally, a Swedish expert, J. A. Stützer, recorded in 1786-1787 that there was a village in Cirebon where the inhabitants provided meat for tigers every day to prevent them from disturbing and stealing livestock (Boomgaard, 2001). This suggests that, historically, the contact between humans and tigers ultimately helped to shape and influence the development of mystical views of tigers in Cirebon society, which had existed since pre-Islamic times.

Tigers have played an integral role in ancient and modern cultures, representing a variety of characteristics and symbolism over the centuries. In Cirebon, the iconic elements of the Macan Ali flag survived and evolved, gaining additional symbolism over time. The symbol of the Macan Ali, which is the tiger symbol contained on the flag, is more widely used as decoration such as calligraphy, painting and so on. The symbol of the Macan Ali is believed to drive away misfortune and is usually installed in the house (Hasbunallah, 2019).

However, when Macan Ali is only a representation of the tiger symbol and no longer a unit representing the greatness of the Cirebon Sultanate, it reinforces the view that symbols can always provide a basis for actions and behaviors in addition to ideas and values. This transformation in the imagination ultimately contributes to the formation of a new understanding of the practice of representation or representative relations in the symbols on the flag (Srirupa, 2006).

In Cirebon itself, *Macan Ali* remains a source of pride as a symbol of Cirebon's Islamic identity, even though the sultanate no longer officially exists. This underscores the idea that history and traditional values can endure through symbols and a strong cultural

identity, even after their peak has passed. Therefore, cultural heritage like the Sultanate of Cirebon should be maintained and preserved so that it continues to be remembered and remains a significant part of Indonesian history.

Symbol of *Macan*: Between Javanese Mysticism and Islam in Cirebon

J.E. Cirlot argued that symbolic meanings always have some correspondence with their literal and historical meanings. It is the basic metaphysical principle of symbols to translate and express themselves in complete unity. For this reason, symbols contain not only metaphysical principles, but also reflections on higher realities (Cirlot, 2001). While, according to Ernst Cassirer, symbols in the metaphysical tradition are sensations that contain reality and can unite knowledge and reality (Cassirer, 1957). Therefore, abstract concepts can become symbols if their use involves intelligible perception. Nor does it have to be intelligible, since it can be intuitive (Tillich, 1958).

From an ideological view, symbols are functional aspects that have a reciprocal relationship of meaning at different levels (Cirlot, 2001). In this sense, *Macan* (tiger) can be understood as a symbol for Javanese society, especially in Cirebon. In other words, *Macan* are a medium used by the Javanese to trigger a series of perceptions, beliefs, and emotional responses. Finally, symbols allow for the abstraction of objects that cannot be measured by limited observation. The abstraction of the *Macan* can then be understood from the Islamic viewpoint, which elaborates with the viewpoint of Javanese mysticism in finding the relationship between the symbol and the object it symbolizes (Eco, 1985).

Javanese mysticism, a form of syncretism of the holy word with local traditions, is a religious phenomenon imbued with mystical traditions (Boogert, 2015). This mystical culture is capable of formulating concepts and teachings of ontology and general metaphysics, encompassing theology, anthropology, and cosmology. Within this framework, Javanese mystical culture gives rise to the belief in the tiger as a sacred mystical animal.

The primary elements of the tiger symbol are the profane physical nature and the imagination of the Javanese culture. The tiger symbol emerges from the imagination, which arises from contradictory ideas, binding all aspects of the person, desires, emotions, and other aspects of the subconscious. This process suggests that the tiger symbol facilitates an exchange from the profane to the sacred. Through the tiger symbol, the Javanese strive to transmit their knowledge to understand physical experiences that are reflections of non-physical things.

Symbols arise from reality in the form perceived by human experience with consciousness. This form encompasses various aspects, including language, myth, religion, art, and science, which are interrelated. Symbols always relate to two things: sensuous (given perception) and sense (meaning of given perception), and the relationship between the two gives rise to the concept of 'representing each other' (Cassirer, 1957).

Thus, it can be said that the form of the Macan Ali flag emerged from the process of transforming the religious experience of the Javanese society in Cirebon into the idea of mysticism. This transformation can be seen historically when Sunan Gunung Jati lent the flag to Mangkunegaran to ward off bad luck. In this case, the

Macan Ali flag represents something else based on an analogous relationship. A symbol can be interpreted diversely and infinitely, and it has the function of expressing what language cannot express into a simple proposition. Based on this understanding, it can be said that the Macan Ali flag can display the same function as the object in different forms. Although the tiger symbol does not imitate all the characteristics of the object, it is enough to create an impression of similarity, especially in cultural and religious views (Ney, 2014). Symbols are necessary because an experience cannot be fully described by linguistic expression (Eco, 1985).

Syncretism is a unification of Javanese culture and Islam. The essence of Javanese religion, in general, is the worship of ancestors realized through mystical attitudes. Therefore, Javanese religious views are based on mystical attitudes and behaviors that still position God as the main force and the ancestors as mediators. This unification occurs because of the relation between two mysticisms, Javanese mysticism, and Islamic mysticism. This is what makes the acculturation between Javanese culture and Islam possible.

Islam in Java, as well as in Cirebon, is a form of implementation of Islamic values that accommodates local traditions and wisdom. Therefore, Islam in Java cannot simply be said to be a form of syncretism. Because after all, Islam in Java is a religious practice in Java in a contextual Islamic paradigm as a model of thinking, understanding, and practicing Islamic teachings by considering local traditions or culture, so that in matters beyond the substance, it can express a distinctive model of Islam with Javanese cultural patterns. The problem of mysticism in Java is closely related to the view of mysticism in Islam. Therefore, it is not uncommon that the

interaction between Javanese culture and Islamic mysticism is a form of syncretic belief.

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that the function of the Macan Ali flag, not only as a symbol of identity of the Cirebon Sultanate, but there is a possibility that this flag is seen as a regalia object that has magical powers and can bring safety or good to a person or society. This conclusion is connected with the presence of pictures or paintings of Zulfakar's sword, a lucky rectangle (magic square) with magic letters (syllable magic). Thus, there is a parallel in function and meaning between the image and the text on the flag in question. This understanding stems from the views of the Javanese people, especially in Cirebon, who perceived tigers as beings that were hosts to human spirits, or more specifically, the spirits of their ancestors.

Based on the opinion of J.E. Cirlot who said that "*the world is a symbolic object*" (Cirlot, 2001, p. xxx), it can also be said that the reality of the tiger symbol in Javanese society, especially in Cirebon, is created based on symbolic principles that come not only from the physical world but also from the metaphysical world. Based on this idea, the basic assumption of the use of the tiger symbol is all things that cannot be seen and felt directly, because they are a combination of symbolic attributes that appear in the socio-cultural realm in the paradigm of syncretism. After all, this assumption stems from the Cirebon people's understanding that tigers are mystical animals as well as a symbol of guardianship.

This is coherent because, within a theoretical framework, the symbol system functions as a cohesive force among members of a community, serving as a channel for social unity through shared

beliefs or established social frameworks. The use of symbols to communicate or foster social relationships relies on the process of interpretation. Therefore, individuals adapt not only to their physical environment, but also to the symbolic structure that surrounds them.

In understanding Macan Ali, it is important to remember that symbols always have a relation with cultural aspects, including the mystical concepts contained in them. Mysticism is a belief that is deeply rooted in the collective mind of the Javanese people, especially in Cirebon. The concept tends to be occult, or as a view based on supernatural powers to meet human needs that can only be understood through the faculty of intuition, not merely intellectual intelligence.

Brumund argued that the original religion of the Javanese derives from Polynesian religions of nature and ancestors, believing in supernatural or magical powers contained in objects, plants, and animals (Brumund, 1868). Therefore, religious elements in Java cannot be separated from the cult, which is a means of communicating with certain objects that are considered sacred (Koentjaraningrat, 1993). As Malinowski puts it, feelings and attitudes that have a mysterious value and are related to the human self cannot be rationalized.

The process of Islamization in Java is characterized by an emphasis on ethical values, taking into account traditional and cultural instruments without outright rejection. This approach has led to a long process of social transformation in Javanese society, with a new value system based on Islamic monotheistic doctrine, often referred to as mysticism. This transformation has subsequently become a model for Javanese institutions and social systems (Geels, 1997).

The course of human history, encompassing belief systems (theology), socio-cultural, economic, political aspects, and other facets of life, is inextricably linked to the geographical and socio-cultural conditions that surround it. The process of acculturation of Islamic teachings with the local traditions of Java has been successful, with both elements developing hand in hand. This is because the teachings of Islam are intended for all people and groups, making them open to all, including mysticism.

Mysticism, often associated with belief systems that involve a bond between humans and God, refers to the establishment of a direct and conscious relationship between humans and God. This relationship is characterized by an awareness of communication and dialogue between the human soul and God, often achieved through a process of retreat or contemplation (Sartini, 2021). Mysticism, as an experience, is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between the individual and the social personality, and between the human and the divine. Philosophically, mysticism places greater emphasis on experience over rationality (Buckham, 1921). This means that mystical experiences are irrational and cannot be explained scientifically. However, through the use of symbols, the understanding or knowledge it produces can be transformed.

In the context of the Macan Ali symbol, it serves as a testament to the successful acculturation of Islam and mysticism in Cirebon. The Macan Ali symbol, representing a tiger, is a powerful emblem of this syncretism, embodying the mystical beliefs of the Javanese people and the monotheistic doctrines of Islam. This symbol, therefore, stands as a beacon of the harmonious blend of local traditions and Islamic teachings in Java, demonstrating the flexibility and

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adaptability of religious beliefs in the face of cultural diversity. It is a vivid illustration of how symbols can transcend their physical form to represent complex and profound religious and cultural concepts.

Conclusion

In the cultural paradigm of Javanese society, including Cirebon, mysticism is understood as the harmonious unification of metaphysical and psychic elements. This unification aims to achieve life's perfection by harmonizing the outer and inner aspects of human beings. In Cirebon, the symbol of Macan Ali has been associated with the idea of mysticism. However, during the period of Colonial Government, it acquired new connotations, predominantly linked with courage and guardianship.

Macan Ali, as a symbol, can be perceived as a manifestation of something else that embodies logical-analytical qualities. This perception is based on the understanding of the Cirebon people towards tigers and is formed through associations in thoughts or facts. It can be posited that Sunan Gunung Jati incorporated the tiger symbol into the flag of the Cirebon Sultanate for accommodating reasons. These reasons are rooted in literal and figurative meanings, as well as in the symbol's role in uniting the two concepts of Javanese mysticism and Islam.

Furthermore, the concept of acculturation is manifested in the flag of Macan Ali, which adopts the tiger as a symbol of the Cirebon Sultanate. This adoption is based on the belief that the tiger, as a sacred and mystical animal, has been part of the faith since before the development of Islam in Java. In addition to being considered a

mystical creature, tigers are also believed to be the embodiment of ancestral spirits who are responsible for guarding.

This study explores the use of the tiger as a symbol and its connection to mysticism within the realms of Javanese and Islamic cultures. It presents a significant opportunity for alternative cultures to interpret the symbol or cultivate an appreciation of mysticism from different cultural viewpoints in Indonesia. Further comprehensive research can be conducted by exploring the symbols and meanings of the tiger in different cultures or religious traditions.

In conclusion, the symbol of Macan Ali serves as a potent representation of the successful acculturation of Islam and mysticism in Cirebon. It symbolizes the harmonious integration of Javanese mysticism and Islamic monotheism, embodying the cultural and religious syncretism that characterizes the Cirebon region. This symbol, therefore, stands as a testament to the enduring power of cultural adaptation and the capacity of symbols to encapsulate and convey deep-seated cultural and religious beliefs.

Endnotes

¹The author prefers to use "*macan*" instead of "tiger" with the excuse of avoiding confusion of understanding, especially when it is used to mention the term '*Macan Ali*'.

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