

Peresean as a Local Cultural Heritage and Relegial Values in the Sasak Community



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ABSTRACT

Peresean is a martial arts tradition typical of the Sasak people in Lombok that contains deep cultural and religious values. This tradition not only depicts physical strength, but also reflects the philosophy of life, such as courage, honor, and self-control. This study aims to examine *Peresean* as a representation of local culture as well as a manifestation of the religious values of the Sasak people with a cultural anthropological approach. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies in Semoyang Village, Central Lombok. The results of the study show that *Peresean* has strong spiritual elements, such as the reading of prayers (*mentere*), fighting ethics that uphold sportsmanship, and its transformation into a means of teaching religious values in the pesantren environment. This tradition is not just a performance or entertainment, but a medium for cultural preservation and character development of the Sasak people, especially the younger generation. Thus, *Peresean* is a cultural heritage that has not only aesthetic and historical value, but also spiritual and moral, which continues to be relevant in the face of globalization and modernization.

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INTRODUCTION

Every community has its own way of expressing its cultural identity. This expression can be found in various forms such as language, art, customs, and rituals that are passed down from generation to generation (Pebriani, Kurnia Ramadhan, and Purwitasari 2024). This kind of tradition is not only a cultural symbol, but also contains values that shape the way of view, attitude of life, and social order of society.

One of the manifestations of this cultural wealth is found in the Sasak people in Lombok, which have a variety of traditional heritage, one of which is *Peresean* (Fazalani 2020). *Peresean* is a traditional performance in which two men fight using a *braider* (rattan) as a weapon and an *ende* (shield made of leather) as a protector. Although it looks like a physical fight, *Peresean* is loaded with symbolic meaning. He describes the values of courage, honor, social solidarity, and spirituality that have been integrated in the belief system of the Sasak community (Solikatun and Kartono 2020).

However, in the increasingly widespread flow of globalization, *Peresean* is now not only known among the local community, but also a cultural attraction that is of interest to tourists, including from abroad (Fajri et al. 2024). Unfortunately, this popularity brings with it a simplification of meaning. Not a few consider *Peresean* as just entertainment or a place for violence, without understanding the noble values behind it. In fact, each *Peresean* performance

holds a deep philosophy that reflects the identity and local wisdom of the Sasak people (Zohdi, Ali, and Ibrahim 2023).

In the context of cultural anthropology, Arjun Appadurai with the theory of *Global Cultural Flows* explains that globalization creates disjunctures between various cultural dimensions, such as *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, and *ideoscapes*, which affect the way people understand and practice traditional and religious values (Paneru and Bohara 2023). Within this framework, traditions such as *Peresean* need to be understood not only as a form of performing art, but as a symbolic expression that contains collective values, including a religious dimension.

The Peresean began with the opening ritual, joint prayers, and the presence of traditional and spiritual leaders. These elements show that *Peresean* cannot be separated from its sacred context, where the religious aspect becomes an integral part of its overall practice (SHELEMO 2023). Within the framework of the theory of religious anthropology, as stated by Clifford Geertz, religion and culture form each other's symbols and meanings in people's lives. Traditions such as *Peresean* can be understood as symbolic systems that instill moral and spiritual values in a tangible form that can be perceived by members of society.

Previous research has shown that *Peresean* embodies character values and cultural identity. Imran and Hananingsih (2021) highlight values such as honesty, respect, and obedience to rules as part of chivalric ethics. Mahardika et al. (2023) relate it to the values of Pancasila, including hard work and social responsibility. Meanwhile, Utama (2021) emphasized that *Peresean* is a cultural symbol that holds the values of honesty, discipline, and democracy.

However, these studies are still limited to social function and character building, and have not yet deeply examined the religious dimension of *Peresean* practice. Hence, this article aims to delve deeper into the spiritual and religious aspects that are integrated in this tradition, as well as affirm that *Peresean* is a form of cultural expression that is not only entertaining, but also morally and spiritually educational.

This research highlights that *Peresean* reflects the cultural identity of the Sasak people, as well as full of religious values that have been inherited from generation to generation. More than just a physical battle, *Peresean* plays a role as a medium to strengthen friendship and strengthen social solidarity between citizens. Thus, this study seeks to remove the narrow perception that sees *Peresean* as violent, and elevate it as a nobly charged cultural heritage.

This paper provides a different approach from previous studies in that it does not only focus on the performance side or aesthetic value, but also highlights *Peresean* as a medium of spiritual and ethical education. The emphasis on the integration of local values with Islamic teachings is the main key to the scientific contribution of this research. In this case, the framework of cultural performativity, as described by Victor Turner, can also be used to understand how symbols and rituals in *Peresean* shape the religious and cultural experiences that live in society.

By combining ethnographic approaches, the theoretical foundations of cultural and religious anthropology, and relevant literature, this research is expected to strengthen our understanding of the meaning and function of *Peresean* in the social, spiritual, and cultural context of the Sasak people in the midst of the challenges of modernity.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type, which aims to describe the symbolic meaning, religious values, and cultural aspects contained in the *Peresean* tradition in depth. The framework used is cultural anthropology, which focuses on understanding the values, beliefs, and social practices of the Sasak people from their own internal perspective (van Wyk 2022). This approach allowed researchers to explore how *Peresean* was understood as a symbolic system that not only reflected the physical culture, but also the spiritual and

moral values of the community. This research does not aim to generalize, but rather to understand the social context and subjective meaning inherent in these traditions.

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Participatory observation allows researchers to be directly involved in the *Peresean* procession, record social dynamics, and observe interactions between traditional leaders, participants, and spectators. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants such as traditional leaders, *pepadu* (fighters), and *pesantren* leaders to explore their narratives and meanings of religious values in *Peresean*. Meanwhile, documentation studies are used to complement field data through literature searches, archives, and relevant references. All the data collected were analyzed by matching them to cultural and religious anthropological theories, resulting in a contextual and comprehensive interpretation of the *Peresean* tradition in the Sasak society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History and Origins of the *Peresean* Tradition

Peresean comes from the word "*pesa*" (hit) in the Sasak language. This tradition is one of the typical forms of martial arts of the Sasak people on the island of Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. *Peresean* practices have been known since the time of the traditional kingdoms in Lombok, especially during the Pejangik and Selaparang Kingdoms (Culture and Preservation, n.d.). This art is in the form of a game that brings together two fighters or *pepadu* who compete with each other using rattan sticks as a beating tool and a shield called *ende* to fend off the opponent's attack (Amni, Burhan, and Paridi 2023).

Historically, *Peresean* has its roots in the tradition of the Sasak people which is used as a place for physical and spiritual training for youth. Before entering adulthood or engaging in inter-group conflicts, young people are trained through *Peresean* to cultivate courage, resilience, and a sense of responsibility and honor. This tradition is part of the process of cultural socialization, where the values of maturity and leadership are practiced directly (Ashari and Muzakir 2020).

The results of an interview with Haji Kinggah, a traditional leader of Semoyang Village, show that *Peresean* originated from the tradition of soldiers who used fighting as a means of channeling emotions as well as training post-war mental resilience. More than just a physical fight, *Peresean* contains a religious meaning that the Sasak people believe have the spiritual power to beg for rain (personal interview). This belief shows that the *Peresean* tradition is inseparable from the sacred relationship between man, nature, and God. In addition, *Peresean* is part of a cultural heritage that combines the values of courage and spirituality, and reflects the way the Sasak people understand life through religious and cultural symbols that are passed down from generation to generation (Fajri et al. 2024).

Peresean as a Local Cultural Heritage of the Sasak Tribe

Although the world continues to evolve, the Sasak people continue to maintain and preserve *Peresean* as an integral part of their cultural identity. This martial art is now not only a tradition, but also a cultural tourist attraction in Lombok. Many tourists, both local and international, are interested in watching *Peresean* as a form of appreciation for the rich culture of Sasak, sometimes some of them think that *Peresean* is just a sport or entertainment. However, in the context of Sasak culture, *Peresean* is a local cultural heritage that is hereditary with the values contained in the implementation ceremony. (Stuart and Stuart 2020).

Fighting in *Peresean* was carried out using a *braid* (rattan stick) and *ende* (leather shield). The fighters attack each other and defend with skill, dexterity, and mature strategy. This match is guided by several referees called *pekembar*, consisting of *series twins* (fringe referees) numbering between two and four people, who are in charge of selecting fighter pairs, and *tengaq twins* (middle referees) totaling one person, who are in charge of leading the course of the match in the arena. The *Peresean* tradition generally lasts in five acts. During the game, the *peacocks* (fighters) must follow the rules that have been set, such as the prohibition of hitting

parts of the body below the waist, the prohibition of kicking or punching, and the game ends if one of the peacocks is injured and bleeding on the head.

Although *Peresean* looks tough and tense, the essence of this tradition is to prioritize the value of sportsmanship and respect for the opponent. Thus, *Peresean* is not just a physical fight, but also a cultural heritage that teaches courage, honor, and self-control (Soewena, Pamadhi, and Azmi 2020). These values not only reflect aspects of social culture, but also have deep religious values, which are integrated in every element of the game.

Religious Values in the *Peresean* Tradition

Although *Peresean* is often associated with fierce and competitive physical duels, the tradition is actually loaded with spiritual values and religious teachings. Among the Sasak people, especially those who still hold fast to their customs, the *Peresean* procession is always accompanied by various religious rituals and prayer chanting (Fajri et al. 2024). This confirms that *Peresean* is not just a traditional sport that emphasizes physical strength, but also a form of expression of spirituality and submission to God.

Before a peacock enters the *ring*, an inner ritual known as *mentere* is carried out first. This term refers to a series of prayers and dhikr that aim to ask for protection, courage, and safety during the match. Rahmawati et al. (2024) explained that *mentere* reflects the *syncretism* between local (mystical) beliefs and Islamic teachings, which represent the historical beliefs of the Sasak people. In an interview with Mr. Suminggah (Selak Marong), a legendary pepadu from Semoyang Village, he emphasized that *mentere* is an important inner strength for a fighter. Without determination, he continued, defeat can come before physical contact begins. He also emphasized that the *ministry* is not a practice of magic, but a spiritual effort through prayer (personal interview).

The recitation of the *mentere* is usually led by village shamans, traditional leaders, or by the pepadu themselves who have received teachings from the elders. The content of the prayer includes a request for protection from injury, physical and mental strengthening, and protection from bad influences. I Wayan Utama et al. (2025) added that in the Wetu Telu community, elements of respect for ancestors and natural forces are also included in the ritual.

The prayers recited not only create a sacred atmosphere ahead of the battle, but also serve as a spiritual reminder to all participants and spectators that *Peresean* is not a place for violence or bloodshed, but an ancestral heritage that upholds noble values. Prayer in this context becomes a link between the external and inner aspects, and emphasizes that every cultural activity should ideally be within the framework of religious morality.

One of the most prominent religious teachings in *Peresean* is the values of *self-control* and *sincerity*, which are the basis of the behavior of every unit. Even though they use fighting tools, the fighters are guided to uphold a fair play attitude and not harbor hatred. After the duel, both parties were required to shake hands and receive *saweran* from the audience fairly. The gift is a form of appreciation for the courage shown during the match. The superior Pepadu will get a bigger share, but no one feels disadvantaged. Even after that, they often eat together in a friendly atmosphere, reflecting the value of togetherness, humility, and sincerity in accepting the results of the match.

Angin Alus, one of the veteran priests, said that emotions often appear in the middle of matches. However, as soon as the announcers stopped the match and the priests hugged each other, the anger instantly subsided. This reflects the strong cultural principle of *ite besemeton* that fellow Sasak people are brothers, and that fighting is not an excuse to hate each other (*Peresean* 2020).

Embedded religious values can also be seen in the concept of *hilm*, which is the ability to hold anger. In practice, anger is considered the main opponent. A Pepadu who loses control of his emotions can be disqualified, as his actions pollute the dignity of the arena and violate the spiritual values in this tradition. TGH. Selamat Syukur Ikhlas from Semoyang Village stated, "*Peresean teaches to exercise restraint. Hit it, but don't get carried away with anger. If you are not able to control it, then everything becomes useless and hurts the ancestral heritage*" (personal interview).

Thus, emotional control in *Peresean* is not only related to the rules of the game, but also a respect for cultural heritage values and spiritual teachings. This tradition emphasizes that true strength lies in maturity in attitude, not just physical. Within this framework, *Peresean* serves as a means of learning about life ethics, personal honor, and peace of mind.

In addition to functioning as a cultural event, *Peresean* is also a non-formal educational facility that instills religious values contextually to the younger generation. Values such as patience, honesty, responsibility, and courage are not only conveyed through advice, but are exemplified directly in the arena (Ratchford et al. 2024). In the majority Muslim Sasak community, this tradition is a vehicle to harmonize local culture with religious principles.

Some Islamic boarding schools have integrated modified *Peresean* exercises as part of character education programs. This adjustment was made so as not to contradict the sharia, but still maintain the original spirit of the tradition. One example is the Nur an-Nahdhiyin Sanggeng Islamic Boarding School which organizes *Religious Pilgrimage* as an extracurricular activity. According to the leaders of the Islamic boarding school, this activity is effective in forming students who are tough, honest, and positively competitive. "*We do not teach violence, but educate students to be brave with manners. This is part of culture-based da'wah,*" (personal interview)

Thus, *Peresean* is no longer simply synonymous with physical combat or entertainment, but has evolved into a powerful instrument of character formation and spirituality. Through these innovations, *Peresean* becomes a medium to instill discipline, mental resilience, and religious values such as sincerity, patience, and respect for others.

This transformation reflects the active efforts of the Sasak people in maintaining cultural sustainability while adapting it to the demands of the times. *Peresean* now appears as a contextual form of moral education, making it relevant in the midst of modern social changes that emphasize the importance of morality and spirituality.

Information Analysis

In explaining the dynamics of local culture in the context of globalization, *the theory of Global Cultural Flows* developed by Arjun Appadurai becomes relevant to see how global flows influence, shape, or even disrupt traditional cultural structures. Appadurai mentions five global cultural landscapes: *ethnoscapes* (human movements), *mediascapes* (media currents), *technoscapes* (technological currents), *finanscapes* (economic currents), and *ideoscapes* (ideological currents). which move non-uniformly and create *disjuncture* or discontinuity in society. He argues that local traditions and identities in an increasingly connected world are no longer stable, but continue to undergo shifting meanings due to pressure and penetration from various global currents.

However, the results of research on *the Peresean tradition* in the Sasak community actually show the resilience of local culture in the face of the current of globalization. Based on observations and interviews, it is known that *Peresean* is not just a physical performance, but a cultural structure full of religious, historical, and moral values. This tradition is still alive, even able to adapt to modern contexts such as character education in Islamic boarding schools.

For example, in terms of historical function, the informants explained that *Peresean* was used to train the resilience and courage of young people before entering adulthood. Values such as leadership and self-control are instilled early on through this practice. Meanwhile, in the religious dimension, *the mentere* (prayer) recited before the match describes the *spiritual dimension of Peresean*, where the pepadu offer tawassul to Allah SWT to be given strength and salvation. This shows a deep belief in the relationship between man, nature, and God.

This is where the relevance of *Clifford Geertz's* theory becomes very important. In the monumental work *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz views religion and culture as symbolic systems that give meaning to social reality. He stated that religion shapes mood and motivation through symbols associated with the order of existence. In this context, traditions such as *Peresean* cannot be understood simply as folk entertainment or cultural attractions, but rather as a symbolic system that conveys profound messages: courage, honor, submission to God, and fraternal values.

For example, the act of shaking hands and respecting each other after the match is a symbol of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *tawadhu'* (humility), and *sincerity*. This is not just a social norm, but part of the structure of meaning built by the religious culture of the Sasak people. Likewise, self-control (*hilm*) is the core of the *Peresean* fight, in line with Islamic values that prioritize patience and not acting tyrannical, even in physical combat.

Furthermore, in the current conditions, *Peresean* is modified for character education in the pesantren environment, with values such as responsibility, honesty, and patience instilled in students. This shows that cultural symbols in *Peresean* not only survived, but also developed creatively without losing their basic meaning.

Therefore, based on these findings, *Appadurai's* view of *cultural disjuncture* as a threat to the stability of local traditions is not fully proven. Precisely what is happening in the Sasak society is active negotiation and cultural resistance that maintains the spiritual and social essence of *Peresean* in the midst of global dynamics. This tradition is able to maintain the continuity of noble values through symbols, prayers, and living social practices.

On the other hand, *Clifford Geertz's theory* is more accurate in explaining the reality on the ground. *Peresean* is not just a form of fighting, but a symbolic network of meanings, which provides direction and a framework of thought for the Sasak people in understanding courage, spirituality, and social relationships. Through symbols, prayers, and ordinances in *Peresean*, we can see how the Sasak people continue to build, care for, and bring their religious and cultural values to life contextually in the midst of the currents of modernity.

CONCLUSION

Peresean is a cultural heritage of the Sasak people that not only displays physical strength, but is also full of symbolic and spiritual values. This tradition was born from the need for the community to shape the character, courage, and responsibility of its young generation. Through ethically organized fighting, *Peresean* reflects the teachings of honor and maturity. These values are kept so that they are not distorted by the outside world who only see them as entertainment. Thus, *Peresean* becomes a reflection of a complete and meaningful cultural identity.

The religious element in *Peresean* can be seen from the existence of *the minister's* prayer before the match starts. This prayer is not just a ritual, but part of the community's belief in divine protection and inner strength. This spiritual aspect shows the close relationship between culture, religion, and human values. Fighters are taught to maintain calm, not to obey emotions, and prioritize sportsmanship. The spirituality that is present is not as a complement, but as the core of the whole practice.

In the context of education, *Peresean* has developed into a means of adaptive and contextual character formation. Some pesantren adopt a modified *Peresean* form as part of the moral curriculum. Values such as honesty, patience, and courage are conveyed through hands-on experience in the arena. This proves that local traditions can synergize with religious teachings in forming resilient and ethical human beings. *Peresean* has become a living and relevant educational tool for the modern generation.

Despite being in the current of globalization, *Peresean* shows extraordinary cultural resilience. He was able to maintain the essence of his tradition while adapting to the needs of the times. The integration of symbols, social practices, and religious beliefs makes *Peresean* not just a performance, but an overarching structure of meaning. This tradition proves that local culture can be a source of spiritual and social strength if managed with awareness. *Peresean*, therefore, is a heritage that deserves to be preserved and inherited.

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