

Javanese Communal Ceremony in Urban Area: Crossing Border and Coming to an End

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Abstract

For traditional Javanese people, performing communal ceremonies is not only to practice part of their cultural heritages but also to represent their concerns towards social integration. Some researches done, however, indicated that because of modern power – particularly in terms of the ideas of industrialization and capitalization, government surveillance, and the intervention of religion, communal ceremonies persisted only in rural areas. Accordingly, within the realm of the possibility, a research was executed to discover the existence of this kind of cultural tradition in specific urban space. Regarding the use of ethnography approach with a qualitative paradigm, *Opak-opak* local tradition held annually in Landungsari village, Malang – East Java, was observed. The findings showed that modern power, both by the embodiment of hegemony and domination, had constructed sudden shift in a couple of years. In 2013 the Javanese cultural agents in this urban area tried to compromise with the aforementioned main aspects of modernism. But, compared to the previous year, the 2014 phenomenon depicted new tendency: the resistance of preserving cultural values through communal ceremony had faded away.

Key words: Javanese communal ceremony, urban area, *Opak-opak* tradition, modern power

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Introduction

Comprising of thousands of islands and inhabited by hundreds of ethnic groups, it is inevitable to say that Indonesia is rich of various cultures. However, modernity transforms traditional cultures; not merely because of the change of social structure of the ethnic groups as structural agents in particular areas but also the pattern of their manifestation. This trend also gives much influence on Javanese local 'traditional' culture.

Though Java is one of the five biggest islands and the densest populated area in Indonesia, not all the inhabitants in Java are Javanese people. In spite of the fact that Javanese people take approximately 45% of Indonesian total population, they disperse, living in almost throughout Indonesia archipelagoes. Only demographically do most of them occupy the central and eastern Java. Today, it is not easy for traditional Javanese people to be cultural agents because the social structure in Java, to a certain extent of Indonesia, has changed. Decades ago, local cultures were vivid in rural areas in where farmers lived communally and they could freely perform their traditions in accordance with their beliefs.

But, modern life promotes huge impact towards the decrease of land for agriculture. Based on the statistical data issued by Ministry of Agriculture on March, 9, 2015, since the year of 2003 the number of farmers has dropped 1.75% or in average = 500 people / year. As a result, the change of the land use for agriculture to industry becomes the main impetus for the shift of social structure, and accordingly, changes the cultural ideas. These socio-cultural phenomena are in the line with Giddens' notion (1993) on the interconnectedness between society and culture. In Javanese society context, this concept is strengthened by previous studies on Javanese traditional rituals in two different locations in East Java done in 2012 and 2013 (Herminingrum, 2014). The results proposed that the cultural ideas even the Javanese moral and ethical values as the heart of the communal ceremony which commonly emerges in every traditional activity has changed.

Observing Javanese communal ceremony, which is carried over generations, exceedingly relies on ethnographic sources covering folk-culture. To mention the mode of Indonesian culture, folk-culture at present time has been invaded by modern power – homogenizing diversity. The so-called modern power cannot be separated from the four factors:

industrialism, surveillance, capitalism, and military power (Giddens, 1993; Barker, 2008). However, to a certain degree in Indonesia, the last mentioned factor has been taken over by invasion of the mainstream religion. To highlight the change raised by the modern power over the Javanese communal ceremony, the research is executed in Landungsari village – Malang, East Java, Indonesia; an area that can be classified as 'drastically changing place'.

The city of Malang is naturally surrounded by volcanoes. The volcanic ash renders fertile soils, and therefore, most of the areas are agriculturally productive so they could support their supplies of food independently. Even the names of the three sub-areas (Javanese language: *Dusun*) in Landungsari village are related to agriculture. They are Dusun "Rambaan" means crops, "Bendungan" means dam or water, and

“Kelandungan” means prosperous. As a rural area, based on demographic data of Landungsari village office, the former 339 hectare village consisted of 25% very fertile agricultural land, whereas the 50% land is fertile or semi-fertile. The rest was used for public space, such as housing, schools, local administrative offices, or public health facilities. Along with the development program, the population dramatically increased to 9.461 people in 2014. Out of this number, the native people take only approximately 42%. Consequently, although by *de jure* Landungsari is a village, it has transformed into an urban space, by *de facto*. This is due to the shift of land use from agricultural functions to small industries, business areas, rented properties, and dense settlements (**Figure 1**).

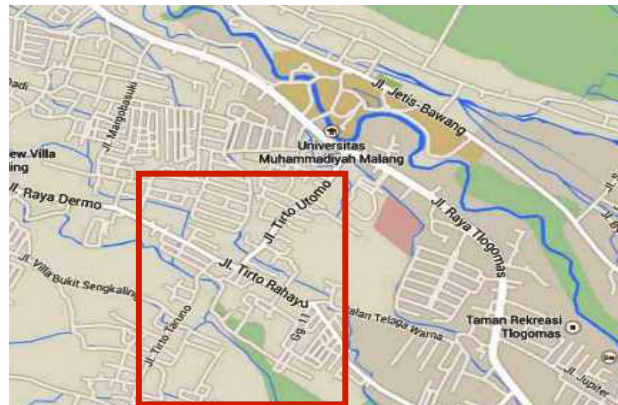


Figure 1: Map of Landungsari Village.

Landungsari Village is situated at the suburb of Malang city. It becomes an edge city with over-crowded population, which main road connects Surabaya, the capital city of East Java Province, with other cities. The green color is the shrinking area of agricultural land.

The observation done by Fromm (2010) showed that generally, the rapid progress of social change makes the village, where traditional farmers inhabited, changes into crowded urban cities because of mobile life. Land which is normally cultivated by farmers is now managed by elites. These elite powers do program, protect, and oversee the natives. Farmers in urban space are trapped in weak position because the power of elite groups. This pervasive social phenomenon is also underscored by Barker (2008). This sort of power influences the hierarchy of social structure: the coercive force which subordinates one to another. This means that there will be superior and inferior groups in social order. Therefore, the intermingled natives and in-migrant population in urban areas shape themselves as the subordinate group which is controlled by the superior group. This also happened in the population of Landungsari village. The modern power originated from industrialism, surveillance, capitalism and religion influence also color the change of communal ceremony in “urban” space of Landungsari. Communal ceremonies are referred differently in every area, such as *Slametan*, *Barikan*, or *Ruwatan*, whereas in Landungsari, it is well-known as *Opak-opak*. The *Opak-opak* tradition is chosen as a representative of local tradition which specifically held by traditional Javanese people to express both social interaction and spiritual action. To discover the mechanism of how the modern power infiltrates the communal ceremony, which transforms the meaning of Javanese local

tradition, observation has been conducted in 2013 and 2014 during execution of the ceremony.

***Opak-opak* Tradition: Javanism behind the Embodiment of Social Integration**

Opak-opak tradition is communal ceremony passed over from one generation to other generations by traditional Javanese people in Landungsari Village, Malang, East-Java, Indonesia. Indeed, as folk culture, this tradition is held not only to demonstrate social integration but also to articulate appreciation to Supreme Being and nature. The three interrelatedness, men and men, men and God, and men and nature, are the core of most traditional Javanese way of life. Since communal ceremony is identical to collective culture, the traditional Javanese people of Landungsari Village identify themselves as a group compared to as individuals when they perform *Opak-opak* tradition. Because the aim of the tradition is to show togetherness, good relation with other members of the group is more significant. The notion of how people are recognized more as a group member rather than as individuals was formulated by Feldman (2003: pp 400) as collectivism. "People in collectivistic cultures emphasize the welfare of the groups to which they belong, sometimes at the expense of their own personal well-being. They also place a high value on harmony in person-group relations". Generally speaking, this concept can be found easily in Javanese communal ceremonies including *Opak-opak* tradition.

Even though *Opak-opak tradition* focuses prominently on collective activity, this communal ceremony cannot be detached from Javanism teaching on qualified human being. To be qualified, men should praise God's creation by embodying the basic principles of the harmony of life:

Memayu Hayuning Bawono and *Memayu Hayuning Bebrayan*¹. These two principles lead Javanese people to follow moral and ethical values in where they live. By having good conducts, Javanese people believe that they are responsible enough to take part in shaping an orderly, peaceful well-being society. A dream society in which people are assured their human welfare, or in Javanese maxim:

*Tata Tentrem Kerta Raharja*². Basically, a peaceful society is only sustained by people who realize the importance of human inter-relationship, respect each other, and are willing to adhere with conformity. To sum up, Javanese people should hold the primary traits of Javanism: adaptable and accommodative towards social changes, which continuously appears in communal activities.

Clifford Geertz's research on a certain Eastern Javanese community in relation with the religion of Java (2014) suggested that Javanese local tradition can be categorized into two types of ceremonies: individual and communal. The individual ceremony

¹ Sumodiningrat and Wulandari, 2014: pp. 252-253. *Memayu Hayuning Bawono* and *Memayu Hayuning Bebrayan* are old Javanese wise words guiding Javanese people to respect nature and others. Literally, the first phrase means keeping the harmony of nature. People have responsibility to preserve ecosystem by avoiding environmental destruction. The second phrase means keeping the harmony of human interrelationship, respect each other and avoid open confrontation.

² Sumodiningrat and Wulandari, 2014: pp. 399. *Tata Tentrem Kerta Raharja* is an ideology derived from old Javanese wise words meaning to endow happiness and harmonious life.

embodies the rites of passage of the life cycle. Meanwhile, the communal ceremony conveys social integration, in Javanese language called *Slametan* which literally means “blessed”, be it men-men relationship or men-nature relationship. The local tradition represents the inner nature of Javanese people, who sticks to their traditional moral and ethical values as a guidance to be qualified human beings. Such principle is called Javanism: the way Javanese people uphold their spiritual conducts (Endraswara, 2014; Abimanyu, 2014). The manifestation of Javanism is shown in a vertical relation, where Javanese people must be resigned (Javanese: *sumarah, pasrah*) towards their Creator, God, and submissive (Javanese: *ngestoake*) towards their superior, both institutional and informal. In Javanism, the traditional concept of conformity (Suseno, 1993) is guided by Javanese ethics for horizontal relationship: helpfulness and humbleness when Javanese people interact within their community, and attentiveness towards the nature. Helpfulness and humbleness signify a high degree of respect, whereas attentiveness towards nature means that Javanese people have to be aware about the balance of ecosystem. Thus, Javanese communal ceremony must always synergize horizontal and vertical relationship concepts. However, the historical journey of Indonesia has put various impacts on the Javanese communal ceremony.

Based on the historical fact, the traditional Javanese ceremony thrived before the 1960s. Only, during the 1960s, because political situation in Indonesia plunged into turmoil, which was always commonly labeled as “communist *coup d’etat*”, every collective activity was being associated to communist activity. So, under the first period of New Order governance, the communal ceremonies became nullified and paralyzed. This is perhaps caused by the military power as one of the four factors affecting the modern power, suggested by Giddens (1990) and Barker (2008).

The once reigning military power represents control by means of violence through oppression. The folk cultures was always became the innocent victims. In contrast, during the 1970s to 1980s, which was the peak of New Order era, the Javanese communal ceremony was awakened because of political interest. Local traditions were modernized to be festivals or carnivals, jubilation, or even became a competition for prize.

Pemberton (2003) proved through his research that Javanese communal ceremonies, especially in Central Java, were empowered to be political tool to gather votes in general election, either in local scope or in national scope. Today, after the fall of the New Order, under the developed Indonesian government, religion influence takes over the military power. Thus, the huge power is not only represented by the material orientation but also the religion invasion. As such, the invasion of modern power has been completed by the transformation as representation of industrialism, control and social supervision which embodies surveillance, profit orientation as the core of capitalism, and the mainstream religion expansion.

The Impact of Modern Power over Javanese Communal Ceremony

Gramsci (1999) affirmed that the external hegemony describes the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling clans, who manipulate the culture of that society. The linkage of hegemony and domination, of course, gives a privilege to impose ideology. This function, underscored by Barker (2004, p.98), brings about the legitimating of “the sectional interests of powerful classes”. He argued that the concept of ideology keep within bounds its practice to ideas which are associated with, as well as, sustain the power of dominant class. Referring to the social classification, Gramsci (1999, p.14) proposed two structural levels – civil society or “private” and political society or “the state”. It means that both hegemony and domination work together to energize their power. While domination accomplishes through coarseness and direct actions, hegemony constructs meanings through repetition and persuasion. Javanese traits indirectly support domination because of the submissive nature. The basic traits of Javanism itself – to adapt, affiliate and conform – renders the Javanese people to be very accommodative, and therefore, contributes to the change.

The impact of modern power towards local tradition as a part of cultural expression does not seem as obvious as a process of influencing supposed to be. Most of cultural agents do not realize that they are being influenced; notwithstanding, it directly conquers their mental as subordinates. To mention the communal ceremony in Landungsari village, the first reason is the mingling of Javanese with other ethnics groups and the change from agricultural to industrial life. The second reason is that the tradition is being carried over through generations, which automatically relies on the older generation, above 60 years of age, whereas in Landungsari village, the population of people of 60 years old or older is less than 3% out of the total population.

The core of Javanese communal ceremony, represented in this study as the *Opak-opak* tradition, expresses the rites as the heart of Javanism. The rituals are initiated by *Ujub Jawa*; praying in Javanese language; led by a local traditional leader whom viewed as a holy patron. The preparation of the ceremony offerings is based on the local beliefs, representing the appreciation of God’s grace. All of the offerings consist of agricultural products, both dishes and food, as well as fruits. The ceremony is held during the agricultural-related phases such as soil cultivation, spreading of the seeds, nursing the young plants, keeping the plants grow, and most importantly on the harvest. The place for the ceremony varies from the graves of ancestors which signifies respect towards the previous generations, water springs, rivers and big trees – symbolizing life which embodies the harmony of Javanese people with ecosystem, to the crossroad – which, to Javanese people, symbolizes an important point to decide which direction one will take in life. This underlies the philosophy of Javanese life, namely *Memayu Hayuning Bawono* and *Memayu Hayuning Bebrayan*.

Not surprisingly, however, the impact of modern power as the external factor has reduced the meaning of the performance of communal ceremony into a mere superficial function, exposing the ceremony to the public. Modern power brings about change, and therefore “development” becomes a powerful word, and the core energy of power is to raise benefit. To face the challenge of national prosperity, the leaders of developing world must endeavor to foster the economic growth and development.

Global interaction (Appadurai, 2010) surely contributes to spread the idea of capitalist practices. Furthermore, in *Culture Matters* (Harrison-Huntington, 2000) Linsay confirmed that economic growth will be achieved when the engines of growth encourages the productive use of the nation's resources. In this particular case, the Indonesian government makes use of the Javanese traditional teachings for the sake of benefits for modernity. Consequently, the Javanese communal ceremony has a new casing, mainly to accommodate tourism purposes. The “development” leaves the soul of Javanism which was embodied by traditional Javanese people through local tradition. The soul has been separated from the body, and as such, the Javanese communal ceremony is slowly dying (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Tourism “modernizes” Javanese communal ceremony

The figures show how tourism advertises through the transformation of communal ceremony to carnival.

Barker (2000, p.11) emphasized that cultural invasion conquers each unit of the way of life “includes the generation of meaning through images, sounds, objects, and activities”. In terms of objects, he referred to clothes as one of the manifestations of cultural invasion. This tendency can also be found in *Opak-opak* tradition held in 2014 compared to the ceremony in 2013. In 2013, the carnival in Landungsari village articulated the fluid Javanism trait by putting the harmony of the traditional and the modern one. This marks the happening of “crossing border”, where the traditional culture can be hand-in-hand with modernity (Figure 3). However, in 2014, this depiction of accommodative notion was totally changed (Figure 4).



Figure 3: Crossing border.

Each image displayed different costumes identifying the coexistence of different cultures and religions (global influence also participated to enrich culture).



Figure 4: The change because of mainstream religion invasion.

The images on the top depicted the carnival in 2013 which still involved the traditional costumes, whereas the images on the bottom from the carnival in 2014 showed that the traditional costumes were denied.

The costume worn by the men who participated in the 2014 communal ceremony showed that the expansion of the mainstream religion, Islam, has a great role in renouncing the Javanese traditional culture. This is the transformation of the 2013 traditional ritual in which all the people are equal. Egalitarian can be viewed from the way the people dress and the age of the participants. Additionally, the traditional Javanese collective activities such as communal gathering that used to take place near the spring, the grave of the ancestor, and under a big tree, have changed because of the influence of religion as one of the components of modern power (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Traditional communal activity (left, 2013) and the religion-influenced activity (right, 2014).

It can be seen from the ceremony in 2014 which was located on stage. Not only does the place shifted, but also the way of how the Javanese people dress homogenously symbolizing Indonesian Muslim, as well as the shift of the nucleus of Javanism the *Opak-opak* tradition namely the prayer in Javanese language, *Ujub Jawa*, into Arabic language.

Interestingly, discussing the invasion of the power which always relates to superiority of authority or leadership and inferiority of subordinate or powerless group, there is no apparent conflict. The dichotomy of Javanism teaching, which makes the internal factor, also contributes in undermining the Javanese communal ceremony. Javanese people always willing to compromise as a collective group, including to welcome all religions – to mention in Indonesia, it covers Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and other beliefs. This is in the line with Javanism traits which are fluid and accommodative. In this particular case, the government makes use of this compromising attitude for the sake and benefits of modernity. Thus, the heart of Javanese communal ceremony becomes nearly extinct because the ceremony itself becomes a marketable event rather than a spiritual rite. Offerings (Figure 6) are the first priority that once inherently attached to Javanese people in expressing their gratitude to God's gift has been abandoned. It can be concluded that the Javanese communal ceremony is now resides in a disavowed position.



Figure 6: The spirit of Javanism.

Two kinds of offerings, which sooner or later, will fade away.

Conclusion

Opak-opak tradition performed in Landungsari Village is a prototype of how communal ceremony shifted from collective activity to institutional activity called festival. The Government's control towards this annual festival, labeled as "local tradition carnival", makes the heart of communal ceremony, the local genius, dying. The observation done over *Opak-opak tradition* performed in 2013 found that the communal ceremony still involves traditional elements such as serving offerings, presenting rituals at sacred places, and demonstrating local tradition both through fashion and performances. Furthermore, in the carnival, the Javanese concept of fluidity demonstrated its spirit through "crossing border" symbolizing the accommodative attitude towards others. This Javanism trait reveals that basically Javanese people can accept differences and open to change.

Whereas that of 2014 indicated that modern power has changed the cultural ideas dramatically. If modernization and its by-products are believed, they will simultaneously change cultural ideas because of the change of social structure. This sort of socio-cultural phenomenon also rises in Landungsari village. The conversion from the rural life, with agricultural pattern, into urban life, together with the mingling population, and the decreasing number of the natives especially the elderly become the factors supporting the transformation of the heart of the traditional cultural ideas. The new casing named tourism has shifted the values of ethical and moral guidance. Javanese local genius which was inherited from generation to generation diminished, even tended to vanish along with the change of the folk culture in Landungsari village – from traditional to modern one. Local government takes dominant role in commercializing *Opak-opak* tradition to be tourism object.

By the reason of modernism and to underline the role of industrialism, capitalism, and the invasion of religion, as well as development, Indonesian government actively focuses on harvesting the riches of traditional culture. As the spirit voicing present time, the power of modernism is promising an established future: prosperity and newness. Tourism program endorsed by government is a sophisticated vehicle to motorize modern power. To mention communal ceremony in urban areas in Java today, this modern power has exceedingly employed its energy to obliterate the past which generated traditional culture wherein the Javanese philosophical values existed. Tourism successfully transforms this kind of ceremony into an engine to foster economic growth. Landungsari village as "urban" space opens a good chance for modernism to penetrate its power over traditional culture. *Opak-opak tradition* as one of the persisted communal ceremony might not be a mnemonic device anymore.

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