

The Crisis of Ecological Meaning in Traditional Rituals under Tourism Regime in Post-Reformation Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the crisis of ecological significance that occurred in traditional rituals in the post-Reform era. Traditional rituals that genealogically seek to integrate human relationships with supernatural powers and natural harmony are massively incorporated into the tourism mechanism. To discuss the issue, we will combine Foucauldian and post-colonial exotic perspectives. The research data we took from our field research in Banyuwangi and news in online media. We analyze the data to find the hegemonic inclination in interpreting ritual under tourism regime. The results of this study indicate that the post-Reformation state regime increased ritual-based tourism activity to gain maximum financial benefits. Gradually, people are also affected by the hegemony of the discourse, so they begin to regularly celebrate rituals without emphasizing the ecological power in them. Under these conditions an eco-cultural movement is needed that can raise public awareness of the importance of returning to integrating rituals with ecological problems.

Keywords: tourism, post-Reformation era, ecological meaning, eco-cultural movement

Introduction

Why is in Banyuwangi there is no agricultural movement with ecological sustainability, but here there are many rituals associated with agriculture such as *Kebo-keboan*, *Seblang Olehsari*, and *Seblang Bakungan*? To answer the question, it is impossible to see only the present time. Further, we need to expose the reality when such rituals since the New Order era have become cultural activities that have been incorporated by the regional state regime as tourism programs. Agrarian rituals in *Using* communities in Banyuwangi aim to appeal to God to be given the fertility of plants and the abundance of the harvest. The attractiveness of men who act for becoming

buffalos has been the main reason for the New Order regime and post-Reformation regimes to incorporate it into the tourism framework with the additional-ideal goal for regional cultural preservation that will contribute to national identity development.

In our opinion, Indonesia in the New Order era was a perfect example of how the traditional cultural preservation efforts had not generated communal power against the dominant forces that had the potential to harm society. So, it was not surprising those cultural events with the dimension of ritual, art, and environment which may bind the people through some symbolic-communal mechanisms were easily modified and incorporated into regional tourism agenda. Certain sponsor banners, official speeches and additional events became more commonplace. The event indicated how the community's defensive activities with eco-cultural missions as well as to negotiate identity in the midst of modernity, got capitalistic meaning by state regime and private investors. In such conditions, the ideal expectations and wishes of the perpetrators were not destroyed along with the breath and sharpness of the eyes of the tourists. However, admittedly or not, gradually, the celebration aspect in the frame of tourism would be more dominant than the integrity of the meaning of nature, ritual, art, and human, especially if the transfer of existing knowledge in cultural events was hindered by many rules of propriety for the younger generation. The result was the marginalization of—or even if necessary, the destruction—a communal resistant spirit against the 'state's style' for agricultural practices which maximized the using of machines and pesticides.

In addition, the maximum celebration of agrarian rituals in the dimensions of tourism is an effective way for the marginalization of ecological forces that once blended with the souls of farmers. They make the ritual—that is still meaningful for the local leaders—as a communal meeting, but not to re-energize the use of manure or pesticides made from natural or to seek appropriate days to start the growing season. Ritual-clad

farming mechanisms are gradually losing their ecological-contextual significance. Moreover ideologically, agriculture is no longer oriented to meet the needs of the family, but meets the wider cycle of consumption and industrial machinery. Not surprisingly, although many communities still hold agrarian rituals, but mechanization and chemical-product use are increasing. That is one of the perfect legacies of the New Order in terms of cultures where ritual riches should be the strength of communal identity to strengthen and empower their subjectivities was slowly positioned as a festive celebration.

This paper aims to discuss the crisis of ecological significance that occurred in traditional rituals in the post-Reform era. Traditional rituals that genealogically seek to integrate human relationships with supernatural powers and natural harmony, are massively incorporated into the tourism mechanism. To discuss the issue, we will combine Foucauldian (1981, 1984, 2013) and post-colonial exotic perspectives (Huggan, 2001). The research data we took from our field research in Banyuwangi and news in online media. We analyze the data to find the hegemonic inclination in interpreting ritual under tourism regime. The results of this study indicate that the post-Reformation state regime increased ritual-based tourism activity to gain maximum financial benefits. Gradually, people are also affected by the hegemony of the discourse, so they begin to regularly celebrate rituals without emphasizing the ecological power in them. Under these conditions an eco-cultural movement is needed that can raise public awareness of the importance of returning to integrating rituals with ecological problems.

Only *celebrating* the rituals

To this day, we can still encounter similar cultural activities that combine art, the environment, and the people, although their meaningful intentions begin to shift away because of the tourism-driven desires promoted by the state regime. The festivity of the postmodern tourism

industry that commands traditionalism and primitiveness as merchandise makes governments in developing countries—in Asia and Africa, for example—competing to create tourism packages globally advertised for attracting and bringing forth foreign tourists. In the view of Huggan (2001), the condition is coupled in the post-colonial exotic perspective. On the one hand, local culture that is still run by society can be used as a resistant force to compensate for the hegemony of global culture. On the other hand, the state regime, because of its desire to accumulate financial advantages, seeks to bring the richness of traditional expression into the tourism industry. Such contradictions, as occurs in many countries, are ultimately resolved by the triumph of the state regime and the capitalist regime with promises of retaining and preserving traditional culture.

In the national and international tourism markets, postcolonial exotic is coupled in a variety of state and private-designed activities to make financial gains. Ritual is one of the cultural expressions that become the object to be commodified in tourism attractions. The discourse of “rituals in tourism” is constructed by the post-Reform State regime and influences activities in the perpetrator community. By using the theory of Foucauldian discourse which emphasizes the use of discourse to form knowledge of dimension of power and interests, we can analyze the formation of ritual discourse in tourism constructed by the state regime in the era Joko Widodo (Jokowi), which genealogically, baked from previous regimes, even when the New Order came to power.

The policies to exploit rituals for tourism interests have been increasingly massive over the past decade, although genealogically it has been massive since the New Order era. The perpetrator community, gradually, has begun enjoying the process of their integration into the tourism market network. Rituals that were not included in the regional tourism agenda in the previous period, in the recent time are registered for wider publications and funding assistance. Relevant agencies believe in increasing welfare by moving economic transactions that accompany rituals

and other tourism activities. As a result, the capitalization and commercialization of rituals became increasingly commonplace. It is this condition that gives rise to the tension between “sacred” and “profane” in which the actual cultural meanings bind the local people must clash with ritual reality as a spectacle deviated from its sacred implementation purposes. The tension is not so visibly present in rituals performed by certain communities. However, the majority of indigenous figures and some experts have also entered into the discursive formation of “ritual for tourism” which is always campaigned by the state regime through ministries or related agencies, such as the Ministry of Tourism and Culture during the regime of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

It is not surprising that more actors and communities are agreeing on the discourses and practices of "rituals for tourism" with various rationalizations for their benefits. The logic of conservation which also supports tourism activities is a rationalization of economic dimension. It means that the implementation of rituals that still exist in the middle of the community can attract tourists to attend at once enliven the tourist village. The tourists will be treated to the *traditional-ness* or *primitive-ness* that has already packed in such a way to make them impressed. This discourse also implies that the dimensions of conservation will be more empowered when combined with the dimensions of tourism for economic prosperity. There are still many rituals that do not remain even though not included as a tourist agenda. The logic of preserving the dimension of the tourism economy becomes a kind of truth regime that has a wide influence on the understanding and actions of community members, bureaucrats, perpetrators, or legislatures. Thus, ritual capitalization has been driven into a regime of truth since the New Order era until the post-Reformation era as market civilization has grown stronger.

When "culture" is reunited within the Ministry of Education and Culture in the era of President Jokowi, there is a hope that the nation's cultural affairs will not be pestered by the intervention of tourism

bureaucrats. Unfortunately, in many districts, cultural affairs are still one with Tourism, so the nomenclature of the ministry has not been able to show its massive influence. What is worth considering is the passing of the *Cultural Enforcement Act* (Undang-undang Pemajuan Kebudayaan, UU No. 5 Tahun 2017) which contains the commitment of the state regime under President Joko Widodo to preserve, develop, nurture and empower local cultures. *The Cultural Enforcement Act* is a reference of governance works from central to local level to make culture as a future investment and national civilization. This law is at the same time a differentiator of the current government regime with previous government regimes—both from the New Order and post-Reformation—which never succeeded in enacting cultural affairs in particular. Please note, since the Suharto regime in power, precisely in 1982, the draft Act on Culture has been proposed to the House of Representatives, but never endorsed.¹ As stated by General Director of Culture Hilmar Farid, there is great hope that with the passing of this Act can provide guidance in better cultural governance and can be useful for strengthening nationality and prosperity.² Meanwhile, Minister of Education and Culture, Muhadjir Effendy, explained that through this Act, the government invites the community to use the objects of culture to build character, increase resilience, improve prosperity, and empower the position of Indonesia in international relations. The ideal-normative wishes and expectations of the General Director and the Minister are certainly legitimate, because they are officials directly responsible for the implementation of the Act.

One of the advantages that can be maximized is that cultural affairs should not always be 'pestered' with tourism targets. However, in general,

¹ "Setelah Menunggu 35 Tahun RUU Kebudayaan Disahkan," *Pikiran Rakyat*, 28 April 2017: <http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/pendidikan/2017/04/28/setelah-menunggu-35-tahun-ruu-kebudayaan-disahkan-dpr-400048>.

² "Kemendikbud Fokus 10 Objek Pemajuan Kebudayaan," *Netralnews*, 21 Juni 2017: <http://www.netralnews.com/news/pendidikan/read/83238/kemendikbud.fokus.10.objek.pemajuan.kebudayaan>.

the Ministry of Tourism still positions ritual activities as one of the main supporters of tourism activities oriented for financial advantages. Moreover, at the lower level there are still many districts whose nomenclature is still the Department of Tourism and Culture. Not surprisingly, the discourses and movements to unite ritual activities with the tourism industry are still intense. The discursive and praxis effect are society is also increasingly common with the tourism labeling for rituals.

In the view of bureaucrats, there are some typical statements related to the discourse of "ritual and tourism". Firstly, "ritual is a culture related to the lives of citizens that can be promoted for tourism activities". This hegemonic discourse becomes a *mantra* which is always mobilized by many ministry officials or agencies when discussing rituals. Head of Tourism and Culture Tourism Promotion Division, Wawan Gunawan, on the sidelines of ritual event in Bandung in 2015, asserted that the ritual is a wealth of cultural dimension of environment and nature that must be preserved because it can be a tourism program. Moreover, the Ministry of Tourism does have a program to promote cultural tourism. Not surprisingly, the Ministry is ready to provide financial support for ritual events that are still preserved and can support the tourism industry.³ Hopefully, this funding will make ritual actors vying to include their annual ritual agenda related to agriculture, environment, mountains, sea, and others, into the tourism agenda at the district, provincial or national level. Secondly, "to be part of the tourist activity, the ritual needs to be repackaged by providing additional packages to the tourists". Yadnya Kasada, for example, was originally just a ritual offering of Tengger residents on Mount Bromo. However, over the past few years, the state regime has intervened on the indigenous actors in Tengger by creating additional attractions that can make tourists not only enjoy the rituals and mountains. An attractive combination of the natural beauty and the local culture of society and the

³ "Kementerian Pariwisata Serious Urus Wisata Ritual", *Merdeka.com*, November 4, 2015, <https://www.merdeka.com/gava/kementerian-pariwisata-serius-urus-wisata-ritual-di-bandung.html>.

addition of spectacular attractions is, borrowing Arif Yahya's term, "the perfect strategy to lift the image" of a tourism attraction.⁴

Thirdly, "ritual or cultural based tourism attractions in general can improve the economic welfare of local people." That the arrival of tourists, both abroad and national, will provide economic benefits, especially with regard to culinary needs, guides, lodging, transportation, crafts, and others. The relation between ritual-based tourism and the improvement of people's welfare is the "sweet dream" that is constantly promoted by the tourism bureaucrats, from central to local level. Through statistical calculations, the quantitative increase in welfare, which is usually general and accompanied by comparisons with conditions in other areas, is broadly aroused and mobilized to ensure that cultural-based tourism activities are truly capable of improving the economic degree of society.

The three hegemonic discourses are, in essence, not much different from the ideal of the New Order regime. What distinguishes is the increasingly diverse fieldwork executions in which the local actors as the subjects are granted "freedom of expression" to design the rituals and their additional attractions. In addition, the advances in media and internet technologies support ritual-based promotions promoted by the state, private companies, community, individual actors, and connoisseurs. This is what makes the influence of ritual discourse in tourism increasingly widespread among the community. Indeed, economically the crowd ritual activities can bring sustenance to the perpetrators, especially with the ongoing economic transactions in the form of sales of food, beverages, crafts, agricultural products, plantation products, and others. Guides or managers can also earn economic sustenance from additional activities such as enjoying nature, coastal, marine, river, or mountain charms, where rituals are performed. These economic expectations makes the lower level actors, with

⁴ "Ritual Yadnya Kasada 2017 Dimeriahkan Ribuan Wisatawan", *CNN Indonesia.com*, July 12, 2017, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/gaya-hidup/20170712125631-307-227337/ritual-yadnya-kasada-2017-dimeriahkan-ribuan-wisatawan/>.

the direction of the relevant agencies, try to include rituals—originally solely aimed at harmonizing the microcosm-macrocosm relationship—into the tourism agenda. Of course the ideal of combining sacred and profane aspects is not a new thing because since the time of the kingdom the sacred things have also been enlivened with profane things, such as the entry of social dances in fertility rituals.

Some agrarian rituals in Banyuwangi, such as Kebo-keboan in Alasmalang and Aliyan, are no longer a means to strengthen local wisdom in the field of ecology and agriculture. Moreover, both rituals have become an arena to bring tourists as much as possible through a large-scale promotion. What happens after the implementation of the ritual is the farmers are still using pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Fewer farmers develop agricultural work using organic methods that are proven to be environmentally friendly. This also happened in several other villages in Banyuwangi that held traditional rituals. This fact confirms that the depth of ecological significance that once existed in the implementation of rituals gradually begins to disappear from the local wisdom of village communities.

After all, cultural tourism is an activity whose presence is unlikely to be rejected by society. Ideally, the connection between the will of the regime through the policy of cultural tourism with the ideal expectation of the community will preserve local cultures and increase economic prosperity makes ritual discourse in tourism hegemonic power agreed. Not surprisingly, more and more ritual-based tourism activities are combined with natural beauty, artistic exotic, culinary delights, crafts, and others. The maximization of the postmodern longing of the metropolitan and urban communities towards the uniqueness and beauty of nature and culture makes the regime of the state and investors more incentive to promote tourism in each region.

As more and more tourists come to an area, their needs must be met. One of them is transportation and accommodation. Not surprisingly, the tremendous blow-up of media to the natural wealth and cultures of

Banyuwangi, for example, contributes to bringing many domestic and foreign tourists. In 2013, the number of domestic tourists visiting tourist attractions in Banyuwangi reached 1.057 million, increasing 22% compared to 2012 of 860,831 people. Still in the same year, there were 10,462 foreign tourists, up to 90.14% compared to 2012 amounted to 5,502 people. Based on an independent survey, foreign tourist spending in Banyuwangi was 2 million rupiahs per day per person, so there was 52 billion rupiahs in revenue.⁵ Such condition has made some big investors starting to invest in Banyuwangi. One of them is investment in hotel field. The same is true in other areas. This shows that the “eyes of investors” are always lurking new opportunities that can support their capital accumulation. In the concept of neoliberal capitalism, the traditional forces that were once thought to block expansion are positioned as a new source of profit. The boundaries that once shackled the logic and the practice of capitalist expansion with various resistances through *communalism* and *traditionalism* were convincingly merged in the incorporation formulas that made the local cultural property a legitimate part of the capitalist movement. Not surprisingly, from day to day, the exploitation and mobilization of natural and cultural exotic through the media and various national and international promotion packages is increasing. In such conditions, the economic empowerment of society can be reread critically. Again, pragmatic benefits are economically derived, but not as large as those of large investors investing in the region. Further, the cultural tourism policy, such as in Banyuwangi, has become the strategic events to negotiate the regional leader’s interest, particularly to reach the wider political agreement (Setiawan, Tallapessy, & Subaharianto, 2017a, 2017b).

⁵ “Banyuwangi Incar Turis Perempuan dan Netizen”, *Kabar24bisnis.com*, September 14, 2014, <http://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20140914/78/257210/banyuwangi-incar-turis-perempuan-netizen>.

Alternative Way

The above fact led to dissatisfaction of cultural actors and NGOs. They try to formulate the concept of tourism that sells rituals as well as the peculiarities of their respective regions, such as culinary, arts, and village natural charm. Citizens are directly involved to serve the domestic and foreign tourists, especially for culinary, agricultural and plantation, art and lodging business. In Kemiren Banyuwangi, for example, residents welcome tourists with culinary and special artistry. As an undertaking, this is certainly fun because it involves direct actors and communities and benefits them, especially in terms of preserving the uniqueness of traditions and economic benefits. At first glance, the practice shows the inability of local people to get out of the hegemonic network of cultural tourism as promoted by the government. However, if we read in more detail, there is a trick played by local citizens to adopt and appropriately adopt state policies to benefit them. They do not just sell the uniqueness, but at the same time empowering the understanding of ritual meanings for the preservation of identity and ecological movement.

The eco-cultural movement is a real concept that can slowly be revived by the actors and escort of cultural tourism activities in the village. This movement combines and reinforces people's understanding of the attachment and integration of cultural expressions such as art and rituals with ecological conservation practices. The presence of rituals certainly cannot be separated from the understanding of the ancestors to create the harmony of microcosm and macrocosm, including the environment in it. It is the actors and companions who have the opportunity to reconfigure cultural forces that can support the ecological movement, such as the awareness of the importance of springs, the importance of bamboo and trees, the reduction of pesticides, and the fight against environmental destruction by the state regime and the capitalist regime in mining. If the local actors only sell the uniqueness of rituals and other cultural expressions, then, it is no different from the behavior of state regimes and investors who preserve

traditions to continue to localize the local cultures to profit. We still believe there are many cultural actors, artists, and volunteers from NGOs who want to empower and strengthen the integration of cultural and ecological activities, so that people gain economic, cultural and ecological benefits.

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