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Sustaining Cultural Legitimation through the Theatrics of Power in the Gong Kyai Pradah Ritual

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Sustaining Cultural Legitimation through the Theatrics of Power in the Gong Kyai Pradah Ritual

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Abstract: This article examines the ritual traditions that are reconstructed to fit within a tourist agenda in the Blitar Region of Indonesia. The ritual is the purification of Gong Kyai Pradah. Tourism in local areas is a phenomenon that rises with the cultural projects used to create identity. Then, the consequences that arise are the issues of how local elites have touched and absorbed rites in the community's life to represent their power at the site of cultural events. In this case, the rite of tradition has a high historical setting, which is significant in interpreting the discourse of sociocultural changes. Although the changes cannot be rejected, the crucial aspects that need to be highlighted are the elite's strategies and the configurations of power that play roles to determine the sustainability of the ritual. Thus, perspectives are built with the theoretical concept of the theatrics of power and the idea of power in Javanese tradition; hereafter, the thick description method was used as a tool to narrate the heritage governance. Then, this article argues that the clash of elites is formed by the need to maintain their power to gain cultural legitimacy. Nonetheless, the position of elites with their basis of power did not have an equal authority; therefore, the traditional elite became marginalized while the modern elite used their ability to flex their formal, legal power through ritual.

Keywords: Elite, Power, Tourism, Heritage Governance, Tradition Ritual

Introduction

In theoretical debates, power is typically represented by a state authority (Alavi 1982; Jessop 2007). Although the state formation and their power relations are built with specific historical settings, the strategy of power remains an enigmatic issues. Contrary to this power, in the context of classical sociology, within some cultures, power can be represented by an object that is then used as an instrument by those wishing to have power over others (Weber 1978; Anderson 1990). Today, in some societies, these two forms of power, cultural and bureaucratic, can influence how authority plays a significant role in constructing social-cultural structure.

When the bureaucratic elites integrate themselves into these traditions, they are flexing their legal, formal status built by the state while also obtaining cultural legitimacy. This cultural legitimacy is vital for elites because it secures their authority; they not only have their formal legal power but also the cultural power to control the community at large (Gouda 2007). This actualizing of authority is present in various forms of sociocultural interactions, which means that power becomes performed in the presence of the community as a locus of seizing domination. Concerning this research, the locus of power for one community in Indonesia is the ritual of the *Gong Kyai Pradah*.

The Gong Kyai Pradah Heritage is a purification ritual that occurs in the Blitar Regency in East Java, Indonesia. Beyond its material representation, the gong is more than a musical instrument, but also as a thing who can present power relations. These power relations are mainly built from the historical narrations that are associated with the origin of the Gong. As a consequence, elites try to have cultural power that adhered to the Gong in the name of a purification ritual. In this ritual, a gong is purified with water and flowers to represent a process

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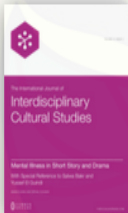

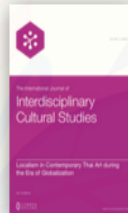
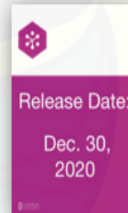
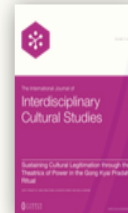
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