

# LOCAL POLICY INITIATIVES TO MAINTAIN JAVA-BAGELEN CULTURE: THE ABSENCE OF WOMAN ISSUES

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## **Abstract:**

The era of decentralization has opened up vast spaces for local governments in Indonesia to develop local culture. In Purworejo Regency, Central Java Province, women have an important contribution to preserving customs and traditions. This research deals with exploring whether the Government of the Purworejo Regency in developing local cultural policies has given recognition to the contribution of women in maintaining customs and culture. This research is a qualitative study involving informants from local cultural figures and the Culture and Tourism Office of Purworejo Regency. The results of the study show that local governments have developed local cultures that are intangible and material, such as various art festivals and inventorying cultural heritage. However, the effort to develop the culture does not include extracting local cultural values, called Bagelen culture. Besides, these development efforts have not yet acknowledged the contribution of women in maintaining the Bagelen tradition. Thus, the policy of developing a local culture in Purworejo Regency is still gender-neutral, although women play an equally important role with men in maintaining their customs and tradition. In conclusion, special attention is needed from the local government to explore the cultural values of the arts, thereby encouraging recognition of the role of women in maintaining their customs and culture.

**Keywords:** women, contribution, culture, Bagelen, policy

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the power of the New Order (*Orde Baru*), Javanese culture was dominant as the focus of experts' study. The phenomenal study of Benedict Anderson (in McVey, 2016) and Pamberton (2003), for instance, revealed a reflection of New Order's dominance which practiced Javanese power tradition. Likewise, Sarsito's (2006) study showed that Javanese culture was a source of legitimacy during the New Order era. Irawanto and Ramsey (2011) even emphasized that in Indonesia, the Javanese have come to be recognized over time as the most culturally and politically dominant. The Javanese culture in this context refers to Solo and Yogyakarta Palace as the center.

When the New Order fell, there was a shift from the dominance of Javanese culture to the rise of regional issues. Similarly, in terms of study focus, the shift occurs in which the experts show more interest in investigating local culture. Hanneman and Nordholt's (2004: 2) study recorded that the rise of identity politics based on localities, women group, religion and ethnic are dominant in the reform era marked by the rise of demands from groups such as women, sharia regulations, customary regulations, religious fundamentalist movements, and so on. Nevertheless, for Javanese women, expressing the interests of women to be accommodated in policy is a challenge, due to the strong Javanese tradition (see Kuntjara, 2016). In regards to this, the Jones study (2015: 317) showed that the

most pivotal issue in the reform era is the development of ethnic identity politics and initiatives for cultural policy in terms of decentralization policies.

Related to the above, this study aims to examine the initiation of regional cultural policies in fostering Javanese culture; to what extent it recognizes women's contributions. The peripheral Javanese culture in this context is Bagelen culture (Koentjaraningrat, 1984). The wider community may not know Bagelen culture, even though it is located not far from the center of Javanese culture. Besides being not too far from the cultural centers of Java, namely the Solo and Yogyakarta palaces, the Bagelen people also live only tens of kilometers from the focus of developing cultural tourism in the New Order government, namely the Borobudur Temple which has been a World Heritage site since the 1980s. A study from Iwahara noted (2009) that cultural tourism is a key concept for understanding New Order tourism policies, and the existence of Borobudur Temple has become a popular destination for international and domestic tourists. It might be so since the Bagelen community is not the experts' main focus of study. Thus, when decentralization policies develop, it is important to examine the socio-cultural situation in the peripheral areas, such as the Bagelen community, which previously did not receive much attention from the experts.

In the context of decentralization policy, the commitment of local governments to treat regional culture through policy is crucial. The government is the party that funds cultural management and development. For this reason, cultural affairs cannot be separated from the state. The study from Silva et al (2013), shows that the role of local government and local culture becomes two inseparable flows. But whether the role of the local government has given recognition to the contribution of women in maintaining customs and traditions or prevailing cultural development policies is still neutral, this study aims to answer them.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

As a qualitative study, this study constructs social reality (Neuman, 1994: 4) related to the initiation of local cultural policies in maintaining Bagelen culture and the extent to which these initiatives include women's contributions. Bagelen culture in this study includes Purworejo District. Koentjaraningrat (1984: 25-27), on Javanese culture, puts Bagelen as a variant of Javanese culture which covers the southwest Central Java region. The main area of Bagelen includes Purworejo Regency in Central Java Province although it is not administrative boundaries. Research informants were selected starting from one particular informant and went further to the next informant (Harrison, 2007: 25), including historical and cultural figures of Bagelen, namely 6 people and the ranks of the Purworejo Regency Culture and Tourism Office, namely 3 people. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, content analysis, and observations. Besides, the data were gathered from the Culture and Tourism Office, the local government websites, research scientific journals, and other relevant sources. The author then analyzes by building an analytical framework using the relevant theory building. The full results of the analysis along with important findings are presented in this article.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The meaning of culture is influenced by power relations involving many actors, with a series of values and interests of actors who have different levels of power (Abdullah, 2009: 2). At this degree, the strong representation of Javanese culture in the practice of New Order power such as the study of Anderson (in McVey, 2016); Pamberton (2003); Jones (2015), Irwanto and Ramsey (2011), becomes perceivable. It means that the meaning of culture at that time was supported by so many

actors from various hierarchies by bringing the same values and interests, related to the dominance of Javanese culture and the shared goal of strengthening the regime.

One of the media to instill the dominance of central Javanese culture during the New Order was through merging culture and education affairs under the same ministry, the Ministry of Education and Culture. When the reform took place, educational and cultural affairs were separated. The field of culture is then integrated with tourism. The field of culture is included in tourism instead. Lately, nevertheless, tourism affairs are under the Ministry of Tourism while the cultural affairs conjoin primary and secondary education. This is in line with the results of a study from Schlehe (2011) which shows that when the reform took place in Indonesia, there was a need to re-understand the policies for managing and developing ethnic-cultural diversity.

Along with the decentralization policy, cultural management varies based on regional needs. Robinson's study (2018) sees cultural management by local governments as a form of "municipalization of culture", where local governments are responsible for managing culture as well as funding. In Purworejo District, until now, cultural affairs and tourism affairs merge. Referring to Perda No. 14 of 2016 on the Establishment and Composition of Regional Equipment of Purworejo Regency, the Office of Tourism and Culture (Disbudpar) has to administer government affairs in terms of tourism and culture, under regional authority including culture, tourism destination development, and capacity development and promotion.

In line with the decentralization policy, the shift in cultural management is also followed by the role of cultural management by local arts councils, local museums, or cultural parks. At present Purworejo Regency already has the Purworejo Arts Council (DKP). The local museum in Purworejo is called Tosan Aji Museum. Furthermore, Cultural Park developed in Purworejo is called Purworejo City Park. Schlehe (2011) study, it stated that cultural theme parks are part of the public space to carry out innovative visions related to globally orient cultural identity, within the framework of cultural diversity in Indonesia.

The involvement of DKP in implementing the Disbudpar policy program is pivotal for coloring Purworejo cultural preservation through regional arts. Kangas et al. (2017: 129) stated that the actor's role is to revitalize new roles for cultural actors to care for culture including art, past legacy, socio-cultural activities, and the potential to change the politics of cultural policy.

The Bagelen art brand is Dolalak Dance. At present, there are approximately 50 Dolalak dance groups. Dolalak dance is played by women who act like Dutch soldiers during the war. The contribution of women in maintaining this tradition makes Dolalak dance continues to grow. Santosa's study (2013, 227-234), shows that in maintaining traditions in dolalak art, women become formidable figures. Women are "mother earth" who are attached to fertility, exemplary figures and can maintain traditional community values and norms.

The study from Setyawan (2016, 118-119) noted that the local government efforts to develop the existence of Dolalak dance including the performance of Dolalak dance in commemoration of national holidays, regular performances at the Regional Arts Building, welcoming guests, attending various art events, the establishment of Kaliharjo Village as the center of Dolalak dance and tourist village, even Dolalak dance has also received patent rights in 2011. However, it remains forgotten that it is the women who have an outstanding contribution to the development of the dance. Accordingly, the regional governments shall pay special attention to women's life who contributed the most to the Dolalak tradition.

The Collaboration of DKP and Disbudpar has also contributed to re-linking the ties of local communities to past livelihoods. For example. It is found in the performance of Bumi Kayu Arahiwang art, an effort to remember and appreciate the forerunner of the birth of Purworejo, as recorded in the Boro inscription on Bumi Kayu Arahiwang in the year 901 of the Ancient Mataram period as well as in organizing the Bogowonto Festival and the Indonesian independence ceremony on the banks of the Bogowonto river. As is known, the Bogowonto River was vital for Bagelen people in the past. Due to its high fertility, many local people relied on their income from farming on the banks of the river.

The efforts of the Purworejo District Government to preserve art and culture are also reflected in the Purworejo 2020 Romance program initiated by the Regent of Purworejo, Agus Bastian. Some other annual cultural events include Pengetan Jumenengan, Gebyar Muharram, Sawunggalih Art Festival and Culinary Festival. Pengetan Jumenengan is a traditional festival commemorating the appointment of the Duke of RAA Cokronegoro I who was the first regent of Purworejo since the name changed from Brengkelan to Purworejo on February 27, 1831. In 2019, the traditional festival of Pengetan Jumenengan was the first to mark the new Purworejo Anniversary namely February 27, 1831. The information about these changes can be read in Carey (2017).

Furthermore, Gebyar Muharram is a festival influenced by Islamic values and traditions to commemorate the Islamic New Year while Sawunggalih Art Festival features a local dance parade. Sawunggalih is the name of Kutoarjo regent. At present Kutoarjo is one of the sub-districts within the Purworejo Regency. Furthermore, the Culinary Festival is a festival of food and traditional snacks for the people in the area (sorotpurworejo.com, March 15, 2019).

Of course, the presence of the state plays a pivotal role in sustaining cultural preservation. The presence of the state to treat regional culture can also affirm the state exists as a protector in building its civilization. In this context, the state takes a position as a cultural preserver. Yet in the view of Giddens, as quoted in Abdullah (2009: 5), the state can also make a pattern of the power relations that are formed. Culture will not be separated from the space in which the culture is formed, maintained or otherwise, changed. This means that the state presence to treat culture is important as long as its presence does not eliminate the indigenous characteristics of the local culture. The presence at the same time also has the potential to reconcile the pattern of new power relations at the regional level.

Further, in preserving other cultural elements, the collaboration between Disbudpar and DKP has not given special recognition to the women's contribution. The performance of Bumi Kayu Arahiwang to commemorate the forerunner of Purworejo, for example, applies neutrally as an effort to maintain culture only. Similarly, the Bogowonto Festival, Romansa Purworejo, Pengetan Jumenengan, Gebyar Muharram, Sawunggalih Art Festival and Culinary Festival.

The efforts of Disbudpar and DKP to organize various festivals as intangible cultural heritage are certainly positive since Indonesia as a member of the Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO does not yet have an Intangible Cultural Heritage Act (Dachlan, 2015). At the local government level, the efforts are realized in organizing various festivals such as the Bumi Kayu Arahiwang Performing Arts, Bogowonto Festival, Pengetan Jumenengan, Romansa Purworejo, Gebyar Muharram, Sawunggalih Art Festival, and Culinary Festival.

Moreover, the local governments also pay attention to material culture. At the national level, the policy related to cultural heritage is Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage. Yet, Purworejo does not have a regional policy that is more operational and regional to protect cultural heritage. Until 2018,

there are no specific policies such as regional regulations governing the protection of cultural heritage objects. The Jatmiko study (2012) also shows that until 2012, Purworejo administration had not optimally carried out the preservation of cultural heritage objects.

However, Purworejo Disbudpar has tried to manage cultural heritage by enlisting a portion of cultural heritage and entering it into the Tosan Aji Museum despite its fund shortages. Until March 2018, Disbudpar managed 156 cultural reserves scattered in various corners of the Purworejo area. It is believed that the number of cultural reserves in the form of buildings and historic objects found in Purworejo Regency amounts to thousands (krjogja.com, March 21, 2018). The thing done by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Purworejo Regency was able to fill the void of regional regulations regarding the protection of cultural heritage. This means that when there is no regional policy regarding the protection of cultural heritage, the existence of a list of cultural heritage inventories can answer the preservation needs of heritage.

Viewing the policy steps of the local government above, it seemingly still less touches on aspects of strengthening local cultural values, in this case, the Bagelen culture. Koentjaraningrat (1985: 5) states that culture also concerns values and behavior. Since the reformation took place, the local government policies related to cultural preservation included the establishment of regional arts councils that held staging arts and festivals, regional museums and cultural parks. When referring to Jones' study (2015: 12-18), the emphasis on culture into art was due to policies implemented throughout the New Order's rule.

The state presence through the policies implemented has made a different understanding of prevailing cultural practices. Of course, various policies supporting local culture are not insignificant to preserve local culture. Yet if these efforts are accompanied by various studies or forums to strengthen the excavation of the Bagelen local values, it will certainly be more comprehensive. Reflections on the social values of the ancient society to support the cultural preservation of the present certainly not only through a culture that is material and intangible. Rather, the inheritance of generation to generation also involves how values and behaviors that spread goodness. Local values also need to be the foundation for the lives of future generations.

All in all, it appears that the process of initiating cultural preservation and development is a long and inseparable decision-making process from the practice of past power. As a peripheral community, local cultural observer, Sukoso, even mentioned that the Bagelen community had lost its identity since the Dutch colonial administration. Thus, policy initiation to treat the order of local culture is not an easy effort to do; it takes a long time and great energy to explore the whole aspects of the local cultural order. The effort was also an attempt to reaffirm the Javanese cultural identity which had always been eroded by central Javanese culture. Later, efforts to explore Bagelen's local cultural values will also encourage recognition of the extraordinary contributions of local women in maintaining local customs and culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

The decentralization policy has opened wide opportunities for local governments to preserve local culture. In this case, there is only a commitment from the local government to encourage the broadest range of government and society to maintain their traditions and culture. In this context, the policy of the Purworejo Local Government to treat Bagelen traditions and culture has developed adequately. So far the efforts of the local government to treat local culture have shown positive initiation and targeted intangible and material culture. However, the effort has not been accompanied

by the attention of the regional government in the form of extracting local values from the Bagelen community. The excavation is important because culture also includes aspects of values and behavior, not just intangible heritage and material. Excavations of local values will encourage recognition of the contribution of local women in maintaining the Bagelen tradition. In this case, it is necessary to develop scientific forums that encourage the exclusion of local cultural values. It is expected that the existence of women as guardians of cultural traditions will also be encouraged to be recognized for their contribution.

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