

# Inquiring into Local Values of Peripheral Javanese Cultural Diversities to Support Democratization

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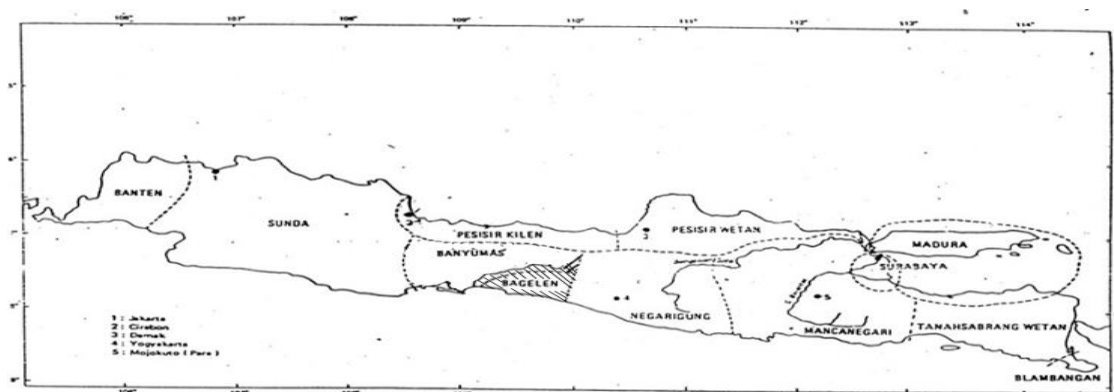
## Abstract

This paper aims to explore local values harmony of peripheral Javanese culture and democratization at the local level. Peripheral Javanese culture in this context refers to Bagelen culture of central Java which bordered Yogyakarta Kasultanan areas. This is a qualitative research by interview and observation with some key informants including public figures, politicians, academicians supported by relevant document investigation. The research result confirmed the theoretical framework which views political culture as an independent variable toward the political process. Political culture is not the determinant factor yet intervenes political change. In this regard, political culture values of Bagelen society outside the areas of Yogyakarta and Surakarta Palace are compatible with democracy since it embodies more egalitarian values comparing to more feudalistic core Javanese culture. Bagelen culture has social strata which are relatively compromising, flexible, expressive and accommodating. It brings implications that it is significant to persist in exploring and enforcing those values in political processes locally to materialize democracy.

**Keywords:** values, local culture, democracy

## Introduction

Indonesia is rich in cultures. The cultural diversities are portrayed by ethnic groups, religions, tribes, language and custom living and developing throughout this country. The most prominent study on Indonesian culture was conducted by Koentjaraningrat (1981) on Man and Culture of Indonesia. The other study on power values in Javanese culture was conducted by Benedict Anderson (1991) who confirmed that power in Javanese culture is distinctively different from western tradition by underlining the analysis on the nature of power, the source of power, number of power, and legitimacy of power. However, studies on democratic values in local culture are still rarely found. Some previous studies on this area include Siti Zuhro et.al (2009) who investigated democratic values in local cultures in 4 provinces in Indonesia namely East Java, West Sumatra, South Sulawesi and Bali.



**Figure 1. Regional Variation of Javanese Culture**

(Source: Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan Jawa*, Jakarta : PB Balai Pustaka, 1984)

This study is intended to accomplish the study of tracing local cultural values that support democracy by selecting peripheral Javanese culture that has not received much attention from experts, namely Bagelen culture in Central Java as a peripheral region of the center of Javanese culture, Kasunanan Solo, and Yogyakarta Sultanate. In this case, peripheral Javanese areas refer to the study of Koentjaraningrat (1984: 25-27) which divides the area into various Javanese cultures. Javanese culture in the study is divided into; 1) *negarigung* or government center which includes Yogyakarta and Solo); 2) Banyumas and Bagelen located in southwest Central Java; 3) coastal areas covering Indramayu, Cirebon and Gresik areas; 4) *mancanegari* which covers Kediri and Madiun); and 5) *pinggir reksa* covering Surabaya and Malang. Koentjaraningrat's study showed that Bagelen and Banyumas are two cultural sub-regions in southwest Central Java (Figure 1).

The map of regional variations of Javanese culture above shows that the scope of Bagelen culture administratively includes Purworejo and Kebumen Regencies. Although in practice, it is difficult to confirm that Bagelen's culture includes the people who live in the area due to acculturation. Both districts are bordered and administratively included in Central Java Province. The selection of Bagelen cultural area in this study takes account that in the context of culture and practices of local power, the two districts are known as safe areas and there have never been any political conflicts in the implementation of political activities such as legislative and regent elections.

The most prominent phenomenon in this cultural area, especially within the community, is a peaceful and harmonious living among the people. Some diversities in the Bagelen community are proven by the significant number of Christians, unlike in other parts of Java where Muslims are dominant in terms of followers. Even in several villages in Purworejo Regency, it has been the center of the development of Apostolic Christian religion for a long time such as Karangjoso Village, Butuh District, Purworejo Regency. The development of Christianity in the region cannot be separated from the figure of Kyai Sadrach as a pioneer of the Javanese Christian Church in Bagelen region. Kyai Sadrach is an evangelist. Although a missionary, the title Kyai which is generally used to refer to Islamic leaders remains attached (Purworejo History, in [http: www.purworejokab.go.id](http://www.purworejokab.go.id) accessed on July 18, 2018). In the meantime, the development of Islam in Bagelen region was especially prominent in the south coast of Java. People who spread Islam included Sheikh Asnawi, Anom Sidakarsa, Abdul Awal, who spread Islam in Bagelen region. Like many other regions in Java, the development of Islam in the Bagelen region also came into contact with local customs. This means that some of the people are still familiar with *kejawen* Islamic practices referring to Islam which still adopts practices before Islam enters and develops in Java. A neat blend of Islam, Christianity, and traditionalism has been commemorated in Kirab Bagelen to commemorate the founding of the oldest church in Purworejo Regency which was established in 1900.

A little review of the mix of local conditions from the value order in the Bagelen region and the peaceful political situation urges the importance of inquiring into the values of the political culture that support democracy in the region. This article is divided into five parts; first is an introduction that shows the urgency and significance of research; second, the research method that is qualitative which emphasizes the flexibility of the research design used; third review of Bagelen culture as a variation of Javanese culture; fourth, studying the values of political culture in Bagelen culture that are in line with democratization; fifth conclusion. These sections are explained below:

## **Research Method**

This study focuses on investigating the cultural values of peripheral Javanese that are in harmony with the democratization process at the local level. One of the peripheral Javanese cultures meant in this study is Bagelen culture which covers the outskirts of the Yogyakarta Sultanate and administratively includes Purworejo and Kebumen Regencies. This study employs the qualitative method in constructing social reality, cultural meaning, and focusing more on interactive processes and events (Newman 1994, 14). The flexibility of qualitative research also makes it easier for researchers to determine the steps of the study. To collect primary data, it was done through in-depth interviews, while secondary data was collected through documentation studies. The interviews were carried out involving

public figures, politicians, academicians supported by relevant document investigation. Data processing and analysis is simultaneously carried out during data collection. The data processing and analysis begins with a data clarification process to achieve consistency, followed by compiling theoretical abstractions of information and facts found in the field. Such stages allow the formation of statements that are fundamental and important to be developed continuously so that conclusions are drawn (Silbergh 2001, 173-175).

### **Bagelen Culture as One of the Javanese Culture Variations: a Representation of Peripheral Culture**

The origin of Bagelen's name is associated with the claim of Galuh (ancient Sunda) kingdom in West Java territory, thus, the area is known as the local term as the area of *pagalihan* or *pagelen* (*bagelen*) ("*Sejarah Purworejo*", [http: www.purworejokab.go.id](http://www.purworejokab.go.id) accessed 18 July 2018). The official source of Purworejo administration said that the historical source of Purworejo Regency is the Boro Tengah Inscription which recounted the origin of Purworejo in 901. The existence of the Boro Tengah inscription cannot be separated from the seizing of Sanjaya who became the king of Hindu Mataram in Java in 600. In addition, the local people were well acquainted with the figure of Nyai Bagelen, a woman who dominated the region in the early days of the ancient Javanese regime (Medang Kamulan). Bagelen is the tax-free territory of Medang Kamulan Kingdom. Therefore, it is very likely that the name Bagelen comes from the name of the female figure. Until now, local people still visit the tomb of Nyai Bagelen located in Purworejo Regency. Related to Kebumen, Sugeng Priyadi (2004: 1-2) states that Kebumen is one of Bagelen regions. Most of the Kebumen is included in *negarigung* while the other belongs to *mancanegari*. In other words, it is the mixture of Banyumas *panginyongan* culture and the nobility culture that refers to *negarigung*. The history of Kebumen cannot be separated from Babad Seruni and Babad Kebumen. Babad Seruni showed the close relation of Kebumen people as a descendant of Pajang while Babad Kebumen links as descendants of Mataram kingdom.

When Islam controlled the land of Java and the Islamic Mataram kingdom became the largest Islamic empire since the 17th century, the Bagelen region included the central region of power or called as *negarigung*. The region was an important region during the Islamic Mataram kingdom because it was a fertile agricultural area and produced staple food. The people were also described as submissive people who always obeyed the authorities and supported the invasion carried out by the Mataram Kingdom against other regions. The political history of Bagelen region cannot be separated from the political changes and power of Kasunanan Solo and Yogyakarta Sultanate due to Dutch colonialism. The Netherlands which was originally a VOC trading partnership (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* or *Duct East India Company*) first came to Java at the end of the sixteenth century when the Kingdom of Mataram was developing its power and grew into a strong state (Ricklefs, 2011: 62). Mataram had to be divided into Solo Sunannate and Yogyakarta Sultanate through the Giyanti agreement in 1755 which was full of Dutch interference. In line with political changes when the Islamic Mataram Kingdom was finally divided into two, Bagelen region which had originally belonged to the area of *negarigung* (power center) experienced a political shift and administratively it is an *mancanegara* (suburb). However, the Bagelen area is unclear whether it belongs to Solo or the Yogyakarta Sultanate since it is overlapping and its boundaries are unclear either (Jarot Heru Santosa, 2013: 235).

The existence of the community of Bagelen region as a peripheral region has implications for social stratification that is not rigid and cultural values that tend to be free. Central Javanese culture has a strict social stratification which was divided into *wong cilik*, lower class (ordinary people) and upper class namely *penggede* (ruling class) (Soemarsaid Moertono, 1985: 19). The stratification is largely based on the aspects of lordship and servitude, servants to the lord, and in terms of one's position in the society. Between *penggede* and *wong cilik* are destined to have different rights and obligations. Bagelen culture as a peripheral culture has a more open social structure and lacks strict strata. Although there are still many groups in the Bagelen region, the social order formed by the small groups does not reflect strong feudalistic values.

The discussion of Bagelen culture cannot be separated from the two nearby cultural traditions. In this case, Bagelen's culture coincides with the center of Javanese culture in the east and Banyumas culture in the west. Symptoms of cultural differences can be identified, among others, by the language used. The Javanese language order has strong strata to distinguish one to whom he speaks and what circles he belongs. The Banyumas language is far more open and not familiar with the social strata of its use. Even Banyumas is the same language used for individuals, wives towards husbands, siblings to older siblings, and so on. The Bagelen culture lies between them so that it shows the transition culture area which also appears in the use of everyday language. Part of the Bagelen region which consists of coastal areas also characterizes communities that are freer and lack of *anggah-ungguh* (speech level). Hence, Bagelen is a transitional language from the central Javanese language (Solo-Yogyakarta) in Banyumas. The dialect that appears in Bagelen is a mixture of Java and Banyumas, with a division of eastern part of Bagelen is more Javanese dialect while the western part of Bagelen is more prominent in Banyumas dialect with a regional boundary called Kutawinangun (Sugeng Priyadi, 2004: 191).

Then referring to Clifford Geertz's (1992) study, cultural arts must be seen as a special window for understanding the worldview and ethos of traditional societies with their unique values, norms, and traditions. The authenticity of a culture is in the form of ideas, thoughts, norms, or concepts in that culture. Identification of Koentjaraningrat (1984: 220-222) on the typical forms of Bagelen art and culture in the form of *wayang urang*, *jathilan*, *ronggeng*, *wayang kulit*, *wayang jemblung*, and *perjanjen*. During the golden times of the Javanese palaces, Bagelen was known as the area where artists producing masks for the *wayang urang* arts come from. As an area bordering the Banyumas culture, some of Bagelen's distinctive cultural arts are similar to Banyumas culture like *jathilan* which is similar to *ebeg* in Banyumas. The art of *ronggeng* or *teledhek* in Bagelen is a representation of ritual dance that lives in the tradition of Javanese peasants in general. Banyumas people call it *lengger* while on the north coast of Java it is called *tayub*. As for the western part of Java, the dance is called *jaipongan* and on the east end of Java Island is called *gandrung*. The ritual dance depicts Javanese peasant worship towards Dewi Sri, which is believed to be a symbol of abundant rice fertility and harvest. Pamberton's study (2003: 280) shows that the story of Dewi Sri exists throughout Java Island despite their various versions of figures and forms of worship that are relatively different. Besides *ronggeng*, Bagelen people still have another dance tradition, *dolalak*, especially in Purworejo District. *Dolalak* dance traditions are often held in *bersih desa*, *ruwatan*, and so on. This dance is an acculturation of traditional art with typical colonial art.

Identification carried out by the prominent anthropologist, Koentjaraningrat, towards Bagelen culture tends to lead to art as one of the universal elements of culture (Sugeng Priyadi, 2004: 175). The above-mentioned arts in Bagelen such as *wayang urang*, *jathilan*, *ronggeng*, *wayang kulit*, *wayang jemblung* puppets, *perjanjen* and so on, become prominent images of cultural art in the Bagelen region. In fact, some of these arts and culture such as *wayang jemblung*, *gambarjen*, *jamjaneng*, and *angguk* show Islamic-influenced local art. Exploration of the combination of these two elements, Bagelen and Islam, is presented below with an emphasis on the strength of accommodating values between the two entities.

### **Representation of Democratic Values in Bagelen Culture**

In line with cultural diversity in Indonesia, the political culture in Indonesia also varies. In this case, Maswadi Rauf (2009) shows that there is a local political culture that has more values in accordance with democratic political culture but there are local political cultures that have little democratic cultural values. Such conditions will have an impact on the implementation of democracy in the regions. That is local political processes such as direct regional elections (Pilkada) democratically run in some places yet problems and conflicts occur in some other regions. Referring to the theory of political culture and democracy according to Larry Diamond (1994), political culture is indeed not a determining factor in the success of democracy yet influences the democracy achievement. The description of Maswadi Rauf on the map of political culture in Indonesia shows the importance of learning the value of local political culture and democracy.

For this reason, this section of the paper explores the local cultural values of Bagelen by focusing on exploring the values of the political culture. As an area that is outside the center of power or state, the political culture of Bagelen can be said to contain egalitarian values compared to the central region of Javanese power. In this case, more egalitarian values can certainly go hand in hand with democracy. This is because the values of equality which are shown by the social layer that is not too strict lead to relationships between social classes that are more respectful. One of them is shown by language differences between social classes that are not too strict. As we know that Javanese has three speech levels, namely *ngoko*, *kromo madya*, *kromo inggil*. Each level indicates the social class that uses the language. The *ngoko* language for the lower classes, the *kromo madya* language for the middle class and *kromo inggil* for the upper class. However, for people living in the Bagelen culture area, the use of Javanese language no longer reflects its class. The dominant one is the language of daily interaction that is free and does not indicate the speaker's level. Such conditions are reflected in the use of everyday language and in the way of social interaction in the Bagelen culture, for example, the people in the coastal area of the South Coast of Java.

The egalitarian aspect can also be portrayed from the art of Bagelen batik. As it is known that batik is a craft that has high artistic value and has been a part of Indonesian culture (especially Java) for a long time. In the art of batik, especially in Kebumen District is known as the Pejagoan and Gemeksakti style. It also characterizes egalitarian values since it is used by all circles. The typical batik style was born from the philosophy and roots of regional culture. Pejagoan and Batik Gemeksekti are one variant of Banyumasan batik which also spread in the outskirts of Java such as Banyumas, Gumelem Banjarnegara, and Bentarsari Brebes.

Thus, society in Bagelen culture is different from Javanese culture, especially in its cultural center which is known to have less support for democracy because of the values of feudalism. In modern political life, the phenomenon of feudalism is seen in the interaction between the people and rulers or between subordinates and superordinate, both in traditional and modern bureaucratic institutions at all levels. The culture is considered as a cultural heritage of the past, in the kingdoms like Surakarta Sunanate and Yogyakarta Sultanate which was also fostered and preserved by the Dutch colonial to maintain colonialism. As for the context of values that support democracy, in line with the egalitarian Bagelen people, compared to the Javanese values of central feudalistic power, Bagelen culture contains values of freedom, equality, and expressiveness. This confirms the description of Larry Diamond (1994) regarding the values of political culture which are not determinants of democracy, but to achieve substantial democracy, the political process requires these cultural values.

The Javanese people who live in the national circle or center of power (Solo Sunanate and Yogyakarta Sultanate) are more synonymous with a paternalistic culture that lacks freedom for the citizens. In the context of strong social strata, paternalistic culture reflects how elites have a more decisive role than lower people including in political life. Especially in economic and educational life, the lives of elites are better than the lower people. This increasingly makes the upper class and lower classes segregated strongly. If this condition occurs and is perpetuated continuously, then democracy will be difficult to enforce in political life.

Lower people's lives in Java, including in the Bagelen culture area still have the values of deliberation and mutual cooperation. In many ways, the two values are still sufficiently advanced to solve problems that arise in the life of society and state. The study of Mattulada (1986) shows, that deliberation and mutual cooperation are persistent democratic values in political culture and have long been practiced in the political process at the local level. The tradition of deliberation and consensus with all forms of variants has been going on for centuries, during the kingdom until now, especially in rural areas. Therefore, there is an assumption that Indonesian people actually recognize the cultural values of democracy and practice these values in their daily lives.

Local political processes namely the regional head elections in Purworejo and Kebumen Regencies can be a reflection of how local cultural values contribute to the achievement of democratization at the regional level. Purworejo district elections, instance, have been held three times since the reform era. In 2000, the election in Purworejo Regency was still chosen by the DPRD in accordance with the

prevailing laws at that time. In 2005, 2010 and final elections in 2015, the district head was directly elected by the people. The election implementation in the area until the election of the Governor of Central Java 2018 was known as a conducive region and was even considered as a political barometer of Central Java Province because it was always maintained securely and comfortably in this local political performance.

Likewise, the implementation of elections in Kebumen Regency was successfully carried out. Since the reform era, the election of regional heads in Kebumen has been four times conducted, namely 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015. In addition to safe and peaceful implementation, there is no political conflict. Kebumen local election presented a strong issue of equality and freedom by the emergence of a female political figure who was elected as Regent of Kebumen for two periods and subsequently became Deputy Governor of Central Java. If we look at the history of woman's leadership, few women are leaders at the local level, both in Kebumen and Purworejo. In this case, Rustriningsih was elected as the Regent of Kebumen in the 2000 and 2005 elections. Although few women were regents, it does not mean that the local culture completely closed the space for women's leadership. Similarly, Purworejo District currently has a female ruling deputy regent, Yuli Hastuti.

The appearance of women who became a leader in the Bagelen culture region seemed to imply the local recognition of the figure of Nyai Bagelen in the past. Nyai Bagelen is the ancestor of the Bagelen people. It at least shows that the competition space between the dominant male being the leader and the real space is also open for women to perform. In this case, the values of justice in Bagelen culture still open the space for the female political leaders. It is very likely that the opportunity that allows women to become local political figures in current time reminded the public of the figure of Nyai Bagelen in the past. This is local wisdom, where the Bagelen people highly appreciate women's character. In accordance with the explanation of Irwan Abdullah (2009: 51-52), that culture is a set of values that have been agreed upon and used to materialize ideal thing but it is necessary to be understood as values are changeable. In the context of culture and woman's contribution at the local level such as Bagelen culture, there may also be many shifts in placing woman's positions and contributions that make the position of women appear to be inadequate.

In addition to the elaboration of democratic values as reflected in Bagelen community above, in fact, the values of accommodating, tolerance and willingness to compromise also surfaced in their lives. In this regard, the portrayal of accommodating, tolerance, and compromise values can be seen as a combination of local cultural arts and Islamic traditions. Some of the people are still familiar with *kejawen* Islamic practices, namely Islam which still adopts the practices of tradition before Islam entered and developed in the land of Java. Such conditions are represented by the integration of religious rituals in *wayang kulit*, *dolalak* dance in Purworejo accompanied by traditional songs and *sholawatan*, *jamjaneng*, *angguk* and tambourines in Kebumen which combine traditional and Islamic art. In addition, the Bagelen community lives in an environment among major religions, but they can still live peacefully and harmoniously. They have differences in religious matters, namely Islam, Christianity and Hindu Buddhism. As mentioned above, several villages in Purworejo Regency have become the center of the development of Apostolic Christian religion since ancient times. The development of Christianity in the region cannot be separated from the figure of Kyai Sadrach as a pioneer of the Javanese Christian Church in the Bagelen region. Meanwhile, the development of Islam in the Bagelen region was especially prominent in the south coast of Java. The whole depiction of the combination of the three, namely customs, Islam and Christianity, is a picture of how the real values of accommodating, tolerance and compromise that greatly support democracy are owned by the Bagelen people.

Political culture is not a determinant factor in democracy. However, the democratization process can run through the support of local cultural values. The study conducted by Siti Zuhro (2009) shows that political culture and its implications for political practices in various regions in Indonesia also vary. In this case, there is a change and continuity in the values of local political culture and local democracy which take place in several regions in Indonesia. In East Java which has a culture of egalitarianism and expressiveness, these cultural values have an influence on the expression and behavior of its people.

The political process takes place in a peaceful and democratic way like what happened in West Sumatra. People in the area have a local culture that is similar to the people of East Java which tends to be egalitarian and expressive. As for the South Sulawesi region, even though the results of Siti Zuhro's study show that the people still hold strong values of patrimonialism. The persistently strong patrimonial culture makes democracy in the region less developed. Local political processes that occur in the region tend to be colored by violence including physical violence.

This article finally points out that in political life, cultural values that support democracy are actually embodied in local culture. In this regard, the values of the local culture of the Bagelen community as a peripheral Javanese culture can support democracy. Thus, reviewing, maintaining and developing local cultural values to reinforce the political process at the regional level is urgently needed to achieve a more democratic Indonesian politics.

## Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper emphasizes that it is very likely that local cultural values can support the achievement of democratization in the political process at the local level. Regarding this research, the local cultural values are shown in the peripheral Javanese culture that is far from the center of Javanese cultural power, Solo, and Yogyakarta Palace. It is in small communities where more equal and free local values live that the achievement of democracy is more likely to be materialized. In contrast to the center of Javanese culture which has feudal and paternalistic values, the peripheral Javanese cultural values, Bagelen, contain more egalitarian values. More specifically, local cultural values that support democracy including freedom, equality, expressiveness, accommodating, tolerance, and willingness to compromise are found in Bagelen's culture. In addition, in rural communities, like most Javanese and Indonesian people, the values of mutual cooperation and willingness to consult to achieve consensus are also evident in the rural culture of Bagelen community. This is also supported by the political competition of opening space for woman's strategic role in the history of leadership in Bagelen. Even Bagelen's name is also synonymous with the glory of Nyai Bagelen, the local figure in the past. Culture is not something static, as times change, cultural values can shift. But at least, the emergence of female political figures at the local level will remind that the contribution of women to Bagelen's history is undeniable. For that reason, exploring continuously and utilizing local cultural values in various cultural regions in Indonesia is crucial to achieving the real substantial democracy in political life.

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