

CULTURAL HEGEMONY: SEDEKAH BUMI, THE TRADITIONAL THANKSGIVING AND OFFERING AT THE TOMB OF GUSTI WONGSO NEGORO

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Abstract—Hegemony deals with the concept of domination of reality that is spread in society referring to the ideological position of the higher class. These influences shape morality, customs, religion, principles, and social reality. Many Javanese people assume that the practice of Sedekah Bumi, the traditional Thanksgiving and Offering, at the tomb of Gusti Wongso Negoro is internalized by the belief in the myths. To investigate this assumption, the present study employed the three stages of Spradley folklore method –pre-fieldwork, while fieldwork (observation and interview), and post-fieldwork. The findings of the study indicated that the community still holds and implements cultural principles containing morality and religion carried out for generations as a form of community customs. The residents voluntarily and sincerely carry out the same ritual every year. This tradition is a form of cultural hegemony because the people of Karang Ploso village, Bangkingan Lakarsantri sub-district, Surabaya city have been internalized by their ancestors' beliefs about the sacredness of Gusti Wongso Negoro's tomb so that they still carry out these obligatory rituals. The implications of this research are (1) cultural preservation; (2) local wisdom illustrated in mutual cooperation to clean the tomb, salvation, gathering event, social proximity, a means of building a national identity.

Keywords—cultural internalization; Gramsci; Myth; Spradley

I. BACKGROUND

Tradition is a description of human attitudes and behaviors that have been in practice for

several years and carried out from one generation to other generations since the early ancestors. As a part of cultures, tradition becomes reference to community's character and virtue. It, in Latin known as *tradio*, meaning 'forwarded', in its simplest sense refers to an activity that has been done for a long time and is part of the life of a community group, normally of a country, culture, or religion in particular era. The most important point about tradition is the information that is passed on from one generation to other generations both written and oral because, without this, a tradition can become extinct.

In addition, tradition can also be interpreted as a shared habit in society that automatically influence the actions and reactions in the daily lives of the members of the community (Soeleiman & Subhan, 2007). In Indonesian context, there are various traditions that have long been in existence ranging from those practised by Javanese, Madurese, Balinese, Sundanese, and so forth. Traditions are often used as a form to express gratitude to the Almighty or as continuing activities that have been inherited by the ancestors. Javanese traditions, for instance, are not limited to a series of activities found in a ceremony of marriage, childbirth, the seventh month of a woman's first pregnancy, and death. They take more forms, one of which is *Sedekah Bumi*, the traditional thanksgiving and offering. *Sedekah Bumi* is commonly practiced by those who live in Karangploso village, located in Bangkingan, Lakarsantri District, Surabaya. From this point of departure, this article attempts to answer the following research questions (1) why does the Karangploso village community in Bangkingan sub-district conduct *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony?;

(2) has the Karangploso village community been hegemonied by *Sedekah Bumi* culture? ; (3) What does this sort of *Sedekah Bumi* research imply?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL RATIONALE

A number of research studies on cultural hegemony have been previously conducted, among others: Indah Ambar Sari (2016), a student of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of Udayana University who wrote an article entitled “Myths and Power: Case Study of *Ngalap Berkah*, Searching for Blessing Hegemony in Kemukus Mountain to become authorities”. This study was carried out to determine how *Ngalap Berkah* ritual influenced the ruling elites in seeking and maintaining power. *Ngalap Berkah* ritual is a ritual performed by Javanese people living around Kemukus Mountain and surrounding communities. The congregation performs the rituals on Thursday and Sunday evening twice a month. Rituals are performed at the tomb of Prince Samudro, where worshipers carry out ceremonies with the aim of seeking for blessings.

Culture as a system associated with coherent symbolic forms as words, objects, behavior, myths, literature, paintings, songs, music, and belief has a close connection with epistemological concepts of the system of knowledge of society (Baker, 2011). It can be understood as a whole of human activity in a social structure, both that happened in the past, at present and in the future. According to Endraswara (2003: 1) and Kuntowijoyo (2006), Javanese culture is the emanation or embodiment of Javanese human mind which includes willingness, ideals, ideas and enthusiasm in achieving prosperity, safety and happiness of the inner and outer life.

III. GRAMSCI HEGEMONY

Gramsci (1971) defines hegemony as a situation in which a “historical block” of faction class ruling social authority and leadership over subordinate classes through a combination of power and agreement. In Gramscian’s analysis, ideology is understood as an idea, meaning and practice, although claiming to be a universal truth which is a map of meaning actually sustains the

power of certain social groups (Femia, 1981: Hendrarto, 1993). The theory of hegemony is the most important political theory of the twentieth century. This theory was put forward by Antonio Gramsci in 1891 - 1937. The term ‘hegemony’ comes from the ancient Greek ‘eugemonia’ (Poerwadarminta, 1990), as stated in Britanica encyclopedia and practised in Greece, applied to indicate the dominance of positions claimed by city states (polissm or citystates) individually such as those committed by the Athenian and Spartan states against other countries that are equal.

Antonio Gramsci is known as the most important political thinker after Marx. Gramsci sees that the dominance of power with morality is far more rooted and is used as a strategy that is often carried out by power (Aceh, 1990; Asrori. 2010; Femia, 1981). Power through morality, or better known as hegemony employs religious activities and other ideologies that are close to people’s lives. Williams defines hegemony as an order in which the way of life and thinking of certain groups becomes dominant by spreading a concept or reality to the whole community, institutions and personal life, which influences all tastes, morality, habits, religious principles, politics, and all social relations, especially in intellectual and moral domain.

Mastering the ideology is one thing that is considered important as it potentially ease hegemony to carry out. Gramsci maintains that ideology is a series of meanings, ideas and practices that support the ruling social groups. It is not separated sets of daily activities. For that reasons, the ideology should be understood as a material phenomenon rooted in everyday conditions. Ideology is a source of rules for everyday behavior and moral actions that are equivalent to religion in a secular sense. Ideology in the sense of Gramsci also assumes a plurality of interests and diversity of goals. It is important to note that it is the hegemonic group that drives and becomes the leader of the alliance of groups with various kinds of interests and promotes a shared goal to achieve together, that is a common conception of the word, based on the interests of the ruler.

To make those who are controlled by the authorities obey the rule, as Gramsci points out, the authorities should take into account subordination they need to approve –not only do they feel that they possess and internalize the values and norms of the authorities. This is what Gramsci means about hegemony or mastering with consensual moral and intellectual leadership. Hegemony is a chain of victories obtained through a consensus mechanism (*consenso*) rather than through oppression of other social classes. Culture is the whole social process where women and men determine and shape their lives. Thus, cultural hegemony is a notion introduced by Gramsci that refers to a power or dominance over the values of life, norms, and culture of a group of people which eventually turns into a doctrine of other community groups where everyone in the group consciously follows it. The groups that are dominated by other groups (rulers) do not feel oppressed and feel what they do as something that should happen.

IV. MYTH THEORY

Myth is a traditional or legendary story that is believed by some people to be true, usually to scare or to warn listeners and told repeatedly. All the myths that exist in the world are myths that have existed since the days of ancestors because stories keep passing on from one generation to other generations (Barthes, 2009). The myth might also change across the periods since community continues to evolve. Identical myths in various places are unlikely to be resulted from diffusion.

Myths in one place have similar features to those in other places. This is what Carl Jung (1991) called a shared awareness that is internally possessed by every human race inherited biologically. Myth, as Rafiek (2010) contends, explains how the essence of life and the world or expresses the existence of cultural moral values in human life. Besides, myths also pay attention to the power that controls human life and the relation between these forces and human existence. Although myths are considered to frequently have relations in their form and function, they are considered as the initial forms

of history, science, or philosophy. Myths also refer to a story in a culture that is considered to have truth about an event that is considered to have truth about an event ever happened in the past. Therefore, myths are stories about the origins of the universe, humans or nations that are expressed in ways that are occult and have deep meanings.

V. RESEARCH METHOD

The methodological approach of this study is a social approach, using descriptive qualitative methods. This research attempts to describe, to explain and to understand how the activities of traditional ceremony are carried out in Karangploso Village, Bangkingan, Lakarsantri District, Surabaya. In addition, this study uses Ethnographic research method introduced by Spradley (1979) –exploring data from the community by positioning them as an informant, not as a subject. In conducting field work, ethnographers draw cultural conclusions from three sources, namely from what people say, from the way people act, and from various artifacts that people use. Prior to printed version, folk stories were told or passed on orally. In this folklore, the ideas of a society will be illustrated, which Spradley calls a culture. Therefore, the source of the data used in this study is public utterances that describe about how *Sedekah Bumi* tradition was carried out at the sacred tomb of Gusti Wongso Negoro.

VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The tomb of Gusti Wongso Negoro is often visited and trusted by the surrounding community or outside the region because the myth of the tomb is believed to be able to grant all requests to those who pray there. Visitors coming to the tomb usually ask for success with their job, easy to get sustenance, get a life partner, or perpetuate power. Apart from myth related issues, Bangkingan community always holds a tradition of *Sedekah Bumi* which takes place at the tomb of Gusti Wongso Negoro. The communities led by the village leader, elders and religious figures carry out the established traditions. They carry out all the rituals without coercion. If they do not carry

out the tradition, they fear that such disaster will occur either personally or in general as a mass disease or natural disasters or crop failure. Thus, the community strongly holds this belief.

Based on the results of interviews and surveys, the community of Karang Ploso Village, Bangkingan, Lakarsantri Sub-District, Surabaya, have been hegemonied by the tradition held at the tomb of Gusti Wongso Negoro that will be described as follows:

- A. Gusti Wongso Negoro is believed to be the founder of the village or the one who cleared the base of Bangkingan village. Therefore, as a form of respect for him, the community of Bangkingan Village carried out the tradition by cleaning the tomb, offering seven kinds of flowers, making various food in the shape of cone, offering myriad fruits, and replacing the white cloth that covered the tomb. They believe that if they obediently carry out all the things required, the community there are safe, peaceful, and prosperous. Their crops is also abundant. Otherwise, they believe there will be a danger, or a disease that will hit the villagers. What is done by the community of Bangkingan village is a sort of hegemony. They carry out rituals throughout generations without coercion.
- B. Gusti Wongso Negoro is believed to be the nobleman of the Kingdom of Mataram. As a nobleman, it is normal for people to respect and to preserve anything taught by their leaders – especially those with nobility status. This kind of respect for his leader is something that the followers should do if they do appreciate their leaders, even though the leader has died. The form of respect ideologically is one of the forms of hegemony.
- C. The elders and religious leaders in Bangkingan village are obedient to the things taught by Gusti Wongso Negoro. This is shown by how the elders and religious leaders led the ritual by praying and putting seven kinds of flowers and lighting incense. The affairs of the elders and religious leaders indicate that they have been seized by the leaders or elders of previous communities and without realizing they have made hegemony to their people. People who followed the tradition also did not realize that they had been hegemonied. They did that tradition without compulsion. They pray together led by religious leaders and village elders. The Bangkingan village community did it voluntarily and practised the tradition with sincerity and reverence.
- D. Community in the village of Karang Ploso and outsiders who often come to the tomb of Gusti Wongso Negoro believe that those who come to the tomb asking for wealth, fortune, matchmaking or talisman for business smoothness will be granted. They believe and do these myths. Thus, those who come to the tomb with certain intentions have been hegemonied by the myth so that they come there bringing flowers and incense. Unconsciously those who have been hegemonied by the myth state that all wishes will be granted if one asks so to the tomb.
- E. The myth stating that there will be a catastrophe in the village unless Bangkingan villagers do carry out the traditions of *Sedekah Bumi*. As a consequence, Bangkingan villagers always celebrate the event. They are worried about the unfortunate things happen to themselves and their villagers. This situation makes them keep celebrating the tradition. They celebrate it without coercion and do it happily and sincerely. Their sincerity is evidenced by bringing such food as earth produce, large cakes and traditional pastries to celebrate the event.
- F. The myth of lake water that can cure disease, get a life partner and launch a business attracts community to come. Many outsiders also believe in the myths

about the wonders of lake water. On the day of ceremony, having gathered in the pavilion, all the residents of Karangploso village open the ritual by opening the door of the tomb, lighting incense, and ending with reciting a prayer and asking for permission from Gusti Wongso Negoro to carry out *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony. After asking for permission from Gusti Wongso Negoro, some elders will go to the lake near the pavilion and place a few offerings in the form of seven kinds of flowers and light incense. Afterwards, all attendees wash their hands and their face to avoid disaster. Likewise, the *ludruk* (Javanese theatrical performance) players have to wash their faces and hands with the lake water before performing to avoid being possessed. The lake water which is believed to cure disease, get a mate, and launch the business was also heard by people outside Karang Ploso village. The outsiders strongly believe in the myth. They come on certain nights to perform rituals. This means that the individuals mentioned above were hegemonied over the miracle of the lake water.

- G. Another myth can be seen from how the community burns *ogoh-ogoh*, a giant puppet symbolized evil spirits or creatures who like to disturb human's life. The community believe that when the *ogoh-ogoh* has been burned then the community will be spared from catastrophe.
- H. The community also believes that the guardian of the tomb of Gusti Wongso Negoro has certain power and charisma. Therefore, the caretaker may not be an ordinary person. The caretaker is normally the offspring of the previous caretakers.
- I. Compliance and adherence of the villagers of Bangkingan to the rules that Gusti Wongso Negoro created was reflected on how they obey the rules by organizing shadow puppets with male

sinden, a Javanese traditional singer. They obey the mandate because it was said that Gusti Wongso Negoro had never married in his life. People strongly believe that if they break the rules, disaster will occur. The community once tried replacing a female *sinden*, then there were many people who suffer from illness.

These are the evidence that Karang Ploso villagers, Bangkingan, Lakarsantri District and visitors from outside the village coming to Gusti Wongso Negoro's tomb have been unconsciously hegemonied by the tradition. They carry out the tradition with full of trust, sincerity and joy.

The implication of the tradition in Gusti Wongso Negoro's tomb is not limited to mutual cooperation to clean the ancestral tomb, salvation with festivity, making pan cakes, making cone-shaped food as the main feature of offerings. Furthermore, this tradition transformed into a place to make friends, sharing alms, a medium for social proximity, a means of building national identity, a sense of nationality and nationalism.

On the day of *Sedekah Bumi* tradition, family groups do not feel fragmented in social status, class, religion, political parties, and so on. The differences dissolve as they gather together, blend and love each other.

VII. CONCLUSION

The community of Karang Ploso village, Bangkingan, Lakarsantri Subdistrict, Surabaya has been hegemonied by *Sedekah Bumi* tradition which is held every year. Their purpose in carrying out these traditional rituals is to avoid calamities (e.g. diseases, crop failures, natural disasters, etc.). The community believes that the tomb of Gusti Wongso Negoro has the supernatural power, when someone prays there, his prayer will be granted and so do other rituals. Therefore, it can be concluded that all the rituals of *Sedekah Bumi* tradition have hegemonied the villagers of Karang Ploso Bangkingan. It implies that (1) preserving this culture is required; (2) local wisdom that is reflected in mutual cooperation to clean the tomb, salvation, hospitality, sharing charity, a medium for social proximity, a means of building national

identity should be maintained.

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