

Cultural Identity Reproduction of *Jawa Deli* Through Marriage Ceremony

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Abstract

Javanese Deli (called *Jawa Deli*) in this paper represent a community that culturally tied to cultural identity that constructed on the basis of sociohistoric space and sociocultural of plantation region in Deli, North Sumatera. Today Javanese Deli as descendants of former contract laborers plantation were brought during Dutch plantation times. The existence of their cultural identity built based on life experience in isolated plantation and they make interaction with local community through marriage ceremony of reproduction effort on the basis of Java culture values and local culture that is Malay. In marriage ceremony vary cultural symbols meet each other and form an Javanese Deli cultural identity. Research methodology in this paper is qualitative with ethnography approach emphasizes on micro case. Marriage become representation of Javanese Deli cultural identity due to marriage constitute family norms that become negotiation space and meeting arena from various symbolic meaning that represented hierarchies and competitive relationship in contemporary era.

Keywords: Reproduction, Representation, Cultural Identity, Marriage Ceremony

1. Introduction

This study focused on Deli cultural space (Note 1), that is the dynamical of Javanese cultural identity reproduction of former contract laborers plantation in an effort to rebuilt Java cultural identity in local culture domain (Malay). This spaces included: *first*, space of colonial political in implementing labor system then shackle life of social, culture and economy of Javanese contract laborers in plantation huts that resulting discontinued identity. *Second*, space of social and culture when Javanese former contract laborers began lived in settlements around vicinity of plantation and village then they make interaction and directly face with local community culture (Malay) then have chance to expressed their cultural identity. Both space be able to illustrates contestation dynamical of Javanese former contract laborers in endeavor to rebuilt their Java cultural with constructing and reproduction their identity into local cultural dynamical and highly complex of structural community of East Sumatera.

The descendants of Javanese former contract laborers in North Sumatera at present migrated to East Sumatera (Note 2) in order to laborers conscription in plantation since late nineteenth century (Breman: 1997; Stoler:2005; Pelzer:1985; Said:1977; Geertz:1976; Lulof:1985). Even though population of Javanese in East Sumatera at this time as biggest number (Note 3) and history of their migration is so long, but variant of Javanese culture in this area, mainly *Jawa Deli* identity many did not researched yet.

Since the opening plantation in East Sumatera on 1867, from year to year Javanese contract laborers population puffing up, get along with intensify company progression and extension of the plantation land. Contract laborers most came from poor villages in Central Java and East Java (Breman 1997). In 1977 for example, more than 50.000 contract laborers brought in from Central Java. All recruiters make recruitment of laborers in big coast towns such as Semarang, Betawi, and kingdom region of Yogyakarta and Surakarta which dense population, as well as Purworejo and Banyumas (Stoler 2005, p.41-47). Plantation laborers tied with contract as plantation coolie come from Java, then so called *Jawa Deli* (or Jadel abbreviated).

In the progression of development Javanese come to Deli not only in labor as coolie, cause development of plantation and urban area in East Sumatera also brought in educated Javanese who worked in staffing sector like teacher, physician, and many more particularly since early twentieth century. But group of educated Javanese live socially and culturally separated by Javanese contract laborers resided in plantation.

The life of contract laborers isolated in plantation huts and labor system for more years resulting contract laborers (Javanese) did not have space to express their culture, then within longer time they lived in alienation situation from cultural space that effecting their discontinued identity as Javanese. This is result in things that should be paid attention like social structure for similar Javanese had applied in their origin in Java Island, unapplied anymore in plantation life. Of course, it can be occur since they only know the planter as highest person in their social class. Among Javanese in plantation, they altogether tied in contract laborer status so there is no hierarchy provision in distinguishing social structure among them.

1.1 Statement of The Problems

Javanese Deli since first generation who had lived for years in isolated plantation lodges so does not expression space for Java cultural identity cause of colonial rule strictest. During lived in lodges, they made powerless not only in economy aspect, but also almost in all living aspects. Javanese contract laborers conditioned in plantation colonialize system that not only exploited physically, but also colonized mind, soul, mental and culture through set of rules in one side restraint, but in other side conditioning a gambling, alcoholism, and prostitution.

All contract laborers are like working machine for plantation. Therefore, nearly nothing opportunity to held Javanese life manner (custom). In marriage custom for instance, slow but sure increasingly not getting done again then what was happened is uninstitutional marital. Plantation colonialism system that implemented on contract laborers make powerless and higher dependence toward plantation had hegemonize life structurally and culturally.

When first generation is over the contract (generally cause of age factor and contract termination) push them abandoned lodges to public settlement in kampongs (village surrounding plantation border or to Malay kampongs). Since that day emerge awareness about their self-awareness (identity). It is interesting to be studies through this study how former contract laborers endeavor to finding and rebuilt Java culture among local communities. Begin here, spirit to rebuilt Java identity culture emerge and evolved primarily in local ethnic context.

With diverse demographic social background from its origin in Java, experience social process with local ethnic during lived longer in plantation vicinity and heterogeneity of local ethnic culture in public settlement, then it was presumably had and being occurred problematic in the process of production and reproduction of complex and severe cultural identity for Javanese former contract laborers in rebuilt Java culture identity in Deli. Problematic in rebuilt culture of Javanese former contract laborers plantation community not just related with cultural dimensions, but also structural dimension remind the emerge of patronage in Malay community.

What is the identity that try-to-build by *Jawa Deli* community will be go into standards Java cultural identity; or even *entropis*; that is where the cultural value system concerned with is not death, but have losing its power to motivate and control existing social systems. Or exactly will produce a *paraphenalia* where the cultural power as cognitive system and normative system had ended, and remain its roles as appendage (accessories) only that function as bodily decoration is not functional toward the way of thinking and behaving which determine who someone or group displaying himself or herself (Kleden 1987, p.238-239). This very interesting phenomenon has been studied amid the ongoing social process long and complicated in North Sumatra, rarity of Java culture reference (speakers) because the *Jawa Deli* generally the plantation workers and the descendants of contract laborers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Culture

Culture is a whole way of life that are found in everyday life as revealed by Williams (1989), which is specifically concerned with the experience of the working class and how they actively construct their culture. The concept of culture is expressed Williams (1981) centered on the everyday meaning which includes values, norms, and objects of material/symbolic.

2.2 Study on Identity

Identity is not something given and unified in a particular community, but always constructed. And in the construction process, a struggle for meaning ensued. As cultural beings, humans try to establish their identity in social and cultural relations to affirm individual and social position in the presence of a community or other communities. Identity is a self-representation through which a person or people see themselves and how others see them as a socio-cultural entity. Ethnic identity is not a personal identity or individual identity. Ethnic identity emerge, grow and develop through relationships with other people and/ or other collective.

Ethnic identity can enter the area of social or political. Commitment of ethnic identity is based on the community culturally needs (Cerulo 1997, p.389). Thus, ethnic identity is not stagnant, stable, and permanent, but could undergo changes due to growth or development of contextually. On the basis of this, it is as said Cerulo (1997, p.400) that identity is not ideal types but suggestive models are models that describe future improvement comes from the past and the present reflections.

Reflections on the past and the present manifested in the *Jawa Deli* life through social and cultural practices. when the *Jawa Deli* out of the lodges farm that are culturally isolated, then began to settle in the new village environment, then comes awareness of "who he is". Awareness of cultural identity is then grow and develop through relationships and social interaction with other local and/or other collective that first settlement, such as Malay, Batak Toba, Karo, Mandailing, etc. In this context, the *Jawa Deli* (former contract laborers) trying to rebuild the Java identity based on the results of the social process with local ethnic people, especially the Malays.

2.3 Reproduction of Cultural Identity

A group of people who moved from one cultural milieu to another cultural environment, experiencing socio-cultural processes that can affect adaptation mode and its identity formation (Abdullah 2006). The new grouping, a new definition of the history of life, and giving identity meaning as strength in change various expressions of cultural and social actions of immigrants. Culture destination has given new cultural framework (Abdullah 2006). Cultural reproduction process is an active process that confirms the existence of social life that require adaptation for a group that has a different cultural background. In the changing social context, the meaning of social and individual of a culture is also changing, because social context gives meaning to individual actions. Changing context also then provide a new awareness for individuals in redefining culture and identity that was followed. Culture reproduction is a process of affirmation of cultural identity is done by migrants, which in this case confirms the existence of native cultures in the context of the new social space (Abdullah 2006).

Identity reproduction process that builds on the social and cultural contexts in the new space is a representation showing the existence of self for the newcomers. Representation is considered an interest "battlefield" or "power" (Hall 1997, p.15-16). Representation is a concept used in social processes of meaning through marking system available. Representations have a certain materiality that can be read or viewed through a visual and verbal forms produced, displayed, used, and understood in a particular context. As something originated from the construction and meaning, then representation is always related to identity may be not understood as something that given.

3. Method of Research

This research used qualitative research methods with ethnographic approach. Operationally this research priority field work research through following phases: meet the subject, observation, in-depth interviews and data analysis. In addition to field work studies, researchers also collected data through secondary sources searching of documents, old newspapers, photographs were obtained from the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia and the National Library of Indonesia, as well as books, articles, journals, also researches related to research theme. All data were obtained either from the results of observation, interviews and document studies analyzed by grouping or conceptual categories (domain analysis) which depicts the life of Javanese contract laborer in Deli. Classifying these data may explain how social and cultural life of *Jawa Deli* produced and reproduced in the social relations context with local community (Malay). Both cultural production and reproduction represent a meaning that is constructed as an endeavor to establish the identity of Java in Deli. This is consistent with data analysis in point of the importance of meaning in cultural studies.

Locations that determined in this study are Klambir Lima Kebun and Klambir Lima Kampung villages that more heterogeneous population. These village represents social relations of plantation community (*Jawa Deli* who are the descendants of former contract laborers) with local communities (Malays). These two villages side by side, and only separated by road district and Deli River. Social relations are reflected in various economic activities, politics, and culture reflects very accommodative relationship between the *Jawa Deli* and local communities that is Malay. In addition to Klambir Lima Kebun and Klambir Lima Kampung villages, also chosen Bulu Cina village where this village is located in the middle of the plantation. Bulu Cina village is a village that is homogenous and dominated by the *Jawa Deli*. This is done to see how point of view of the people in these villages to understand the identity of all Javaneness with various symbolic expression in activities both in marriage ceremonies and daily life.

4. Results and Discussion

Early arrival of the Javanese in North Sumatra began from the development of Deli tobacco plantations pioneered by Nienhuijs. In the late 1860s an early arrival Javanese laborers to Deli. This contract laborers alive and living in barracks plantations. Plantation colonial system has degraded values of Javanese culture. The contract laborers living in barracks plantation with a partner without bound by marital institution. The women chosen and given to workers deemed to have been working and are deemed eligible to receive the "wife". Young women laborer and almost all of the Javanese, forced to prostitute themselves (Stoler 2005, p.49). The system is governed by growers who forced the women laborer to serve men needs who was appointed by the foreman as a companion with status not married, have to serve the sexual needs and household. This was done because there are rules of the plantation which is a necessity that must inevitably run as a consequence of the contract work system.

In addition to the absence of the marriage institution, the contract laborers faced with a system of legalized gambling. Gambling is a legal activity that deliberately created for fun as well as shackle for laborers into the cycle of poverty that resulted in the life of the contract laborers keep dependent on the plantation. The living conditions of plantation workers created by the plantations colonial system to keep them under contract binding. All behaviors performed by Javanese contract laborer is the result of situational factors established by plantation system in the colonial period that result Javanese contract laborers become new people, and it was all

a consequence of their migration to Deli. As stated by Stoler (2005, p.78) that Java laborers feels himself apart from the formalities and old customs, are placed in an environment that is completely foreign to him, then they are creatures that have been changed completely.

During at the lodges they have colonized (both physically, and socially, mentally, soul, mind and culture), resulting in Javanese contract laborers not only a community which is structurally very powerless, but also culturally experienced discontinued identities and missing identity. Awareness of Javanese identity (which almost disappeared because for decades imprisoned in the routine as plantation contract laborer) began to emerge and evolve when the former contract laborers began to leave the plantation huts and then settled in the township-village in the plantation vicinity in entity dominated by the Malays. As also described Stoler (2005, p.57) that each year hundreds of countless Javanese people displaced out of plantation environment and stay wedged between plantations and Malay villages. They formed a new sub-class in hinterland areas settled with Malay villages on the "loan" land as a boarder. This practice is mentioned by Stoler has been found by 1888.

The need to land for the life continuation of the contract laborers who have been out of the plantation (hereinafter referred to former contract laborer) which is dominated by local ethnic that is Malay, make Malay influence is so great for the life of former contract laborers. When in plantations structurally Javanese contract laborers in the class structure equal to slaves who colonized by the capitalist powers of plantation, and when they came out still faced in the social structure as a new proletariat class in the Malay village. This causes former Javanese contract laborers dependence on the Malays (the source of life, especially land). Dependence on to access of the source of life under the rule of Malay emerge a culture of adaptation strategies within the former contract laborers in Malay communities. As suggested Perret (2010, p.170) that taking of Malay identity is always strategic and can be attributed to the usefulness of land management access for private purposes. One of the strategies of cultural adaptation made by the former Javanese contract laborers by adopting various attributes or symbols of Malay culture in the marriage ceremony.

Marriage ceremony performed by an ethnic group can serve as a cultural identity marker of the group, because of customs that made it a habit and with whom they express their culture. As revealed by Maunati (2004, p.30) that the identity markers derived from a typical of the indigenous cultures that expressed by an ethnic group in question. *Jawa Deli* marriage ceremony produced on the basis of the limited knowledge and experience of Javanese cultural values. This is because the Javanese were imported as contract laborers are poor people are in Java social structure is the proletariat (Geertz 1981, p.307). Java customs is not too much attention; which is important in the implementation of the ceremony there was an Java atmosphere and attributes aiming to differentiate themselves with other ethnic groups. This is demonstrated through the marriage ceremony rituals are practiced in the *Jawa Deli* community.

Marriage ceremonies practiced by does not have a uniform used as guidelines standard. *Jawa Deli* marriage ceremony distinguished by residential communities that are grouped into two patterns: *first*, the marriage ceremony conducted by core ceremony that is *nemokkan* (Note 4) that practiced by *Jawa Deli* community in the plantation villages and surrounding is homogeneous (dominated by *Jawa Deli*). *Second*, the marriage ceremony without *nemokkan* is practiced by *Jawa Deli* community in residential township is heterogeneous (dominated by the local community, namely Malay). Both patterns of marriage ceremony performed by the *Jawa Deli* is still not referring to the Java customs in Java Island. If in Java Island, the ceremonial order so considered, but for *Jawa Deli* it was nothing too important.



Figure 1. Tools of *nemokkan* ceremony.

This tools are used when *nemokkan* procession consist of egg put on stone grinder, pestle, and flower water in "bokor" (brass bowl).

First marriage pattern that is, marriage ceremony with *nemokkan* procession. In *Jawa Deli* tradition, *nemokkan* procession represent ceremony to unite bride groom and bride who accompanied by respective families. In *nemokkan* ceremony each family will accompanying each bride by carrying *balai* (Note 5) and

kembar mayang (Note 6). *Balai* and *kembar mayang* that carried by respective families will be put on in *pelaminan* (Note 7) after *nemokkan* ceremony finished. In *nemokkan* found “*injak telur*” (egg trampling) performed by the groom with breaking an egg by using the right leg.

Egg it will be broken placed on an object called a stone grinder. This stone grinder is usually used by local communities to smoothing spices. However, the use of grind stones are also not constitute a provision in implementation of egg trampling procession in *Jawa Deli* marriage ceremony, because the egg trampling stone grinder is replaceable with a plate. After the eggs trampling procession then the bride will cleanse the groom's foot using water that has been mixed with a variety of flowers are placed in a bowl or a special bowl called a “*bokor*”. In addition to stone grinder, the tools that used in the egg trampling procession are pestle. Pestle is an elliptical tool with a size of 1 (one) meter made of wood and are usually used for pounding rice. Pestle is placed next to a stone grinder. Pestle symbolized as male, while the female is symbolized by a stone grinder. Both of these things have a meaning that man and woman have been united in a bond of marriage. Even in the case of another marriage, ceremony tools in *nemokkan* procession also presenting stone grinder, pestle, flower water in a bucket, also presents broom made of coconut leaves skeleton compilation tied into one. After the step by step in *nemokkan* ceremony has finished, the bride and groom will be accompanied to the *pelaminan* (dais where bride and groom sit). After the bride and groom sit, the families from the bride and the groom will do *tepung tawar* (Note 8) accompanied by *marhaban* (Note 9) to the bride and groom.



Figure 2. *Balai*

Balai as symbol of Malay culture that always appear in *Jawa Deli* marriage ceremony

The second pattern of the marriage ceremony is a marriage ceremony without *nemokkan* procession. At this ceremony the groom did not perform egg trampling procession and carrying *kembar mayang* as the marker of Javanese identity. In this marriage ceremony pattern shows the symbols of Malay dominance through a series of ceremonies such as carrying *balai* by the bride and groom, sowing insipid flour and Marhaban. Javanese culture symbols only visible through the wedding dress used.



Figure 3. *Kembar Mayang*
Kembar Mayang represent symbol for Java bride.

Marriage patterns found in the *Jawa Deli* community which currently represents the cultural identity of *Jawa Deli*. Existence of Java identity built based on limited knowledge of Javanese culture and socio-economic conditions too limited, and the rarity of *Jawa Deli* figures since the beginning of their arrival as contract laborers in the plantation. While they are confronted with new social world that is Deli which is dominated by Malay ethnic. Cultural identity is formed by the practice and meaning through social processes in everyday life. *Jawa Deli* cultural identity is formed through ways to adapt and approach the dominant power to try to get the position and access to resources in the systems of greater power relations that is Malay culture. As was said by Abdullah (2006) that in the changing social context, social and individual meaning of a culture is also changing, because the social context gives meaning to the actions of individuals. Changing context also provide a new awareness for the individual in redefine the culture and identity that was followed. Culture reproduction is a process of affirmation of cultural identity is done by migrants, which in this case confirms the existence of native cultures in the context of the new social space. It should be noted that in the context of power system structural is fixed similar in Java and the colonial rule system in the plantation (Deli), where the power system is fixed as Java does not give space to the Javanese in the structure of the proletariat to act as an active and creative actor. While the *Jawa Deli* community in which the structure of society was to proceed "on-going process" allows (give) a space for everyone to express themselves and be creative in order to establish the identity of the Javanese in the new social space. Sociologically, the structure still in process benefiting *Jawa Deli* community to become actors in negotiating and competing with the local culture (Malay).

5. Conclusion

Space for negotiations in *Jawa Deli* identity reproduction endeavor looks at the level of culture, especially the marriage ceremony. Marriage ceremony as a representation of the *Jawa Deli* identity is the domain of the convergence of symbols and meanings that are identity reproductions through various symbols that meet each other, especially Javanese and Malay symbols.

Jawa Deli marriage ceremony shows that local cultural symbols that Malay which includes *balai*, *tepung tawar* and *marhaban* always appear in the marriage patterns practiced in both homogeneous and heterogeneous communities. All three symbols always comes up with the fixed rhythm (constant). While the symbols of traditional Javanese marriage ceremony is hardly visible clearly and unequivocally basic standards. At almost all marriage ceremonies remains the dominant Malay-style marriage ceremony, while Java custom more just as additional accessories, it was also inconsistent among families.

Cultural practices of the descendants of the former contract laborers (who then commonly called the *Jawa Deli*) well within the tradition of Javanese cultural mores in practice only limited external accessories or *paraphernalia* that has (not) yet work in shaping the way of thinking and behaving as the Javanese as it should be.

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Notes.

- Note 1. Deli as largely covered whole coastal area of East Sumatera (Sumatera Oostkust), from East Aceh Regency, Langkat, Deli Serdang, Serdang Bedagai Batubara, Asahan to Labuhan Batu. For the interest of this study Deli are that mentioned only covered former of Deli Sultanate area that is Kedatukan Hamparan Perak area at present included villages of Bulu Cina, Klambir Lima Kampung, and Klambir Lima Kebun, where administratively these areas put in Hamparan Perak subdistrict Deli Serdang Regency East Sumatera.
- Note 2. In period of Dutch Hindia government Sumatera island as governmental area so called Gouvernement van Sumatera headed a governor posted in Medan City. Sumatera area then so called province divided into some administrative regions hereinafter keresidenan (colonial administrative residency), one of them is East Sumatera keresidenan. After the independence of Republic of Indonesia East Sumatera keresidenan encompassed areas Langkat, Deli Serdang, Asahan, Labuhan Batu, Tanah Karo, Simalungun, Tanjung Balai, Pematang Siantar, Tebing Tinggi, Medan, dan Binjai.
- Note 3. According to 2013 Statistic of Central Bureau data, population of East Sumatera province as 13,768,724. The population based on ethnic included : Java (33.40%), Malay (5,86%), Karo (2,04%), Simalungun (2,04%), Toba/Tapanuli (25,62%), Mandailing (11,27%), Pakpak (0,73%), Nias (6,36%), Minangkabau (2,66%), Chinese (2,71%), Aceh (0,97%), and other (24,63%).
- Note 4. *Nemokkan* is local term to mentioned core of the ceremony in organizing *Jawa Deli* marriage ceremony. In Java Island this ceremony called *panggih* or *temu pengantin* (bride meet).
- Note 5. *Balai* made from four leg timber and three stories. In each story contained cooked *pulut kuning* (yellow sticky rice) symbolize fertility and nobility. Every story contained *pulut kuning* in *balai* embed (put on) shafts decorated with artificial flowers and each decorated flower filled with boiled egg.
- Note 6. *Kembar mayang* is decoration made of coconut leaves with yellow color or so called "janur" term. This *janur* formed with various decoration like flower, animal resemblance to peacock, grasshopper, and kris (Javanese dagger).
- Note 7. *Pelaminan* as special dais had decorated with diverse ornament that special made for the bride and the groom.
- Note 8. *Insipid flour* is the activity sowing flowers and sprinkle water mixed with lime for both brides. This tradition as Malay culture it is difficult to abandoned and become symbol of sincerity (all had done become insipid), there is nothing to be disliked, no aversion inside the heart. Meaning that by sowing bride with insipid flour all families had sincerely and willingly both bride cruising the household ark.
- Note 9. *Marhaban* is the activity to singing praise song taken from Al Quran verses performed by groups of women members of ten until fifteen.

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