

## THE TRADITION OF *KEBO-KEBOAN* AMONG *USING* COMMUNITY, EAST JAVA IN THE CULTURAL RELATIVISM PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

The *Using* community is a native of Banyuwangi Regency, East Java. There are a number of traditions among the community that we can still observe today. One such tradition is the *Kebo-keboan*, a popular cultural event based especially in Alasmalang Village, Singojuruh District, Banyuwangi Regency. The tradition is stereotypically seen as a negative one by other ethnic groups. People outside the *Using* community usually see the *Kebo-keboan* tradition as an image of the lack of morality, although it is not really the case. The purpose of this study is to describe the understanding of the *Kebo-keboan* tradition from the performer perspective and explain it as a study of cultural relativism. Using literature review and observation, we can reveal that the *Kebo-keboan* tradition is related to transcendental connection in agricultural activity, such as to ask for soil fertility, good harvests, and to avoid disaster. The *Using* community believes that implementing the tradition does not contradict the teachings of Islam. It is a symbol to give thanks for God's grace as the teaching of Islam. Communities outside the *Using* community might assume that the *Kebo-keboan* tradition deviates from Islamic teachings because the *Using* community believes that ancestral spirits can grant their wishes. Appearance or behavior like a buffalo and possessed is considered insulting or degrading human degrees and dignity.

**Keywords:** *Using* Community, *Kebo-keboan*, Cultural Relativism.

## INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian nation is rich in traditional cultural treasures that are spread throughout the archipelago. One of the cultural treasures of the Indonesian people is the culture of the *Using* community who live in the Banyuwangi Regency. Banyuwangi Regency is at the eastern end of the island of Java, consisting of 25 districts. Subdistricts that become cultural pockets of *Using* community include Banyuwangi Kota, Licin, Giri, Glagah, Kabat, Singojuruh, Songgon, Blimbingsari, Singojuruh, Srono, Cluring, and Genteng (Dinas Kependudukan dan Pencatatan Sipil, 2018; Rahayu & Hariyanto, 2008).

The *Using* community has a variety of traditions that still exist and are preserved today. They are known for its rich traditional arts products. The traditional arts of the community is related to their religious values and livelihoods in agriculture. Traditional arts of *Using* community is one of the important icons in the Banyuwangi Festival. On this occasion one of the *Using* community traditions will be revealed, namely the *Kebo-keboan* tradition.

The *Kebo-keboan* traditional ceremony is one of the village clean ceremonies in Alasmalang village, Singojuruh District. Alasmalang village is divided into five hamlets namely Krajan, Wonorekso, Karangasem, Bangunrejo, and Garit. Alasmalang village is 3 km away with a distance of 15 minutes to the subdistrict capital, while the distance to the nearest regency capital is 20 km with 1 hour by motorized vehicle. This village can be easily reached because of the availability of infrastructure and means of transportation. The condition of the road infrastructure is paved and existing facilities such as buses, trucks, village transportation and motorcycle taxis are very easy to find. The ease of reaching Alasmalang village is a support for the development of cultural tourism, especially in Alasmalang village (Purwaningsih, 2007; Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009).

## DISCUSSIONS

### The Tradition of *Kebo-keboan* As the Culture of the *Using* Community

#### a. The Origins of the *Kebo-keboan* Tradition

The traditional ceremony of *Kebo-keboan* is a ritual ceremony in the clean hamlet activities which is carried out by the *Using* community in Alasmalang village. The ceremony was aimed at rejecting the logs, asking the Almighty God for the safety of the village. In addition, also

expressions of gratitude towards God for the fortune or harvest that has been obtained. This ceremony also embodies the ritual of worshipping Dewi Sri as a Fertility Goddess.

The traditional ceremony of *Kebo-keboan* is a legacy from Mbah Buyut Karti who is the ancestor of the Alasmalang village. Mbah Buyut Karti was the first person to carry out the *Kebo-keboan* traditional ceremony. Mbah Buyut Karti lived during the Dutch occupation around 1725. Mbah Buyut Karti had knowledge that was able to enter the unseen realm and conquer spirits that could threaten the safety of the population.

The start of the *Kebo-keboan* traditional ceremony is when the farming community in Alasmalang village experiences a *paceklik* season, so that agriculture is seriously damaged. The dry season is prolonged which results in all agricultural crops not producing results and crop failure. In addition, in the village a *pagebluk* outbreak was a malignant disease outbreak affecting the community. The *pagebluk* outbreak caused people who were sick the next morning, then died at night or in the afternoon sick in the morning to die. The outbreak did not only attack humans but also attacked livestock belonging to the community one of which was a buffalo.

Responding to these problems, Mbah Buyut Karti sought a solution to the problems experienced by its citizens. Then, Mbah Buyut Karti did a meditation to be able to communicate with the spirits waiting for Alasmalang village. Finally, from the results of his meditation, Mbah Buyut Karti found a way to overcome the calamity that befell the residents of Alasmalang village. Mbah Buyut Karti gathered the entire population in Alasmalang village with the aim of inviting the entire population to perform *selametan* or *tasyakuran*, as a medium to expel all forms of evil spirits that threaten the safety of the population.

The traditional ceremony of *Kebo-keboan* is carried out by imitating the behavior of buffaloes in the rice fields with the intention to reject loggers. The cast at the time of carrying out these activities in an unconscious or trance state. It turned out that, after a salvation was made, in Alasmalang village was free from disaster. Finally, the *Kebo-keboan* salvation activity was made a tradition for the people of Alasmalang village, which is still being carried out and preserved.

The *Kebo-keboan* tradition is a village clean tradition ceremony that is usually carried out with village salvation. The aim is to invoke

soil fertility, abundant harvests, environmental security, peace of life, and distance from disaster. The *Kebo-keboan* tradition is held every 10 Sura or Muharram and is chosen on Sunday. Sunday was chosen as the day of the organization of the *Kebo-keboan* ceremony with the consideration that the community members work every day, Sunday is a holiday, so that all members of the community can follow and see the tradition of *Kebo-keboan*. The choice of the month of Sura or Muharram as the month of the implementation of the *Kebo-keboan* ceremony with the consideration that according to Javanese belief, the month of Sura or Muharram is considered to be a sacred month. The implementation of the *Kebo-keboan* tradition is centered in the Alasmalang village, namely in Watu Loso, Watu Gajah, Watu Tumpang, Watu Karangan and along the Alasmalang road (Purwaningsih, 2007; Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009).

In the implementation of the *Kebo-keboan* tradition, it begins with the preparation of the ceremony, which is held one week before the activities of mutual cooperation to clean the house and village environment. Next, one day before the *Kebo-keboan* tradition was carried out, the mothers together prepared offerings consisting of squeeze, cone, and ingkung. In addition, various ceremonial equipment such as cake, singkal, hoe, blackmail, fresh pitung rice, banana, coconut and rice seedlings were prepared. In the evening the youths prepare various kinds of crops such as bananas, sugar cane, cassava, maize, gumantung nutmeg, Kependhem nutmeg, nutmeg nutmeg. The plant was planted along the Alasmalang village (Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009).

#### **b. Cultural Elements in the *Kebo-keboan* Tradition**

Culture in Anthropology is often interpreted as a whole system of ideas, actions, and results of human work in the context of community life that humans obtain through the learning process (Harsojo, 1988: 93). According to Koentjaraningrat (2000:181) culture with the basic word culture comes from the sangsakerta language "buddhayah", which is the plural form of buddhi which means "mind" or "reason". So Koentjaraningrat defines culture as "power" in the form of creativity, intention and taste, while culture is the result of copyright, intention and taste.

According to Koentjaraningrat culture has universal elements. These cultural elements are considered universal because they can be found

in all cultures of the nations of the world. According to Koentjaraningrat there are seven elements of universal culture, namely language, knowledge systems, social systems or social organizations, systems of living equipment and technology, systems of livelihoods, religious systems, and arts (Koentjaraningrat, 2000: 190).

#### a) Language

Language is a beautiful pronunciation in the cultural elements and at the same time becomes the main intermediary tool for humans to continue or adapt culture. There are two forms of language, namely spoken language and written language.

Language in the *Kebo-keboan* tradition is associated with song that accompanies the performance of the ceremony. The song is usually sung at the time of the ider earth. The meaning contained in these songs symbolizes the request to God through Dewi Sri who is believed to be the goddess of fertility for all types of plants. The songs were sung by all the companions of Dewi Sri and the community. Here is one example of song that is always sung especially when the procession is seeding rice (Effendy & Anoegrajekti, 2004; Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009).

Thanksgiving song:

*Muji syukur rang  
Allah, urip nyaning  
ndunyo kudu nedi  
till ibadah kang  
kelimo lair batin aji  
urip kang sejati  
pirman Allah wes  
mefii ujude rejeki  
kang dianti-anti  
Allah kang moho  
suci lan moho  
kuoso tanah ibu  
pertiwi*

Meaning: Give thanks to God, life in the world must undergo the fifth worship physically and mentally, so that his life is more true / peaceful, the word of God is definitely in the form of awaited fortune, the most holy God and the almighty power of the motherland.

### b) Knowledge System

Knowledge systems related to knowledge of the surrounding natural conditions and the properties of the equipment used. Knowledge systems include knowledge about natural surroundings, flora and fauna, time, space and numbers, the characteristics and behavior of fellow human beings, the human body.

The knowledge system in the *Kebo-keboan* tradition is related to the implementation of the traditional *Kebo-keboan* ceremony in the Alasmalang village. The time of the ceremony is only done once every year, precisely every 10 (ten) Javanese calendar suro or Muharram month in the Islamic calendar. This is based on the belief of the local community that on the 10th of Muharram was the first ceremony held by Mbah Buyut Karti.

At that time the residents of Alasmalang experienced a *paceklik* season and were attacked by a plague of pagebluk or disease. In addition, the month of Muharram is a very precarious month and many evil spirits roam. So it is necessary to hold a traditional ceremony *Kebo-keboan*. Besides the time of the ceremony, the place of the ceremony is important in the implementation of an event. The ceremony is usually considered sacred, so it should not be visited haphazardly. Usually the place of the ceremony is considered as the center of occult activity in the local community (Budhisantoso, 1993; Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009).

### c) Social System or Social Organization

Social Organization is a group of people whose members feel one with one another. The social system or social organization which includes: kinship, associations and associations, state systems, systems of living unity, associations.

The social system and organization in the *Kebo-keboan* tradition are related to the actors. Based on their roles and functions, various parties involved in carrying out traditional *Kebo-keboan* ceremonies can be grouped into two groups. First is the traditional actors. They are the parties who are directly involved in every ceremony of the ceremony.

Customary performers in the *Kebo-keboan* traditional ceremonies consist of:

- 1) The ceremonial leader or *Pawang* who is the adat executor who is a descendant of Mbah Buyut Karti. In this ceremony, there are kyai



- who are also used as the leader of the ceremony during the prayer procession.
- 2) The incarnation of Dewi Sri is symbolic of people's belief in the existence of Dewi Sri. The woman who plays Dewi Sri must have certain conditions. If one of the conditions is not fulfilled, the ceremony will not be carried out. The conditions are still descendants of Mbah Buyut Karti, a virgin / girl, well behaved, has a beautiful face.
  - 3) Dewi Sri's attendants are girls from Alasmalang village who have criteria like Dewi Sri. The ladies in charge were carrying the squeeze and offerings which were used to carry out the Earth Earth march.
  - 4) *Kebo-keboan* is the executor of each stage in the implementation of the ceremony, which has the criteria of a large, healthy, strong body and is still a descendant of Mbah Buyut Karti. These Kebo-keboan amounted to five to ten pairs, one pair amounted to three, namely two buffaloes and one controller.
  - 5) Their farmers are involved when carrying out ider earth.
  - 6) *Buldrah* is a figure in charge of leading the implementation of Earth Earth carnation The people chosen are those who have expertise in agriculture, and are usually the mobilizers of citizens in agriculture.
  - 7) *Modin Banyu* is a person who has daily duties to manage the irrigation system.

The second group is the organizer. They are a member of the community in charge of organizing them to do various things in that traditional ceremonies. The team are assembled in a special committee formed by the community. The structure includes the head, secretary, treasurer, and various certain sections (Budhisantoso, 1994; Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009).

#### **d) Living Equipment and Technology Systems**

Technology is the total number of techniques possessed by members of a society, including the whole way of acting and doing in relation to the collection of raw materials, the processing of those materials to be made into work tools, storage, clothing, housing, transportation equipment and other needs in the form of material objects. The most prominent elements of technology are physical

culture which includes, means of production, weapons, containers, food and beverages, clothing and jewelry, shelter and housing as well as means of transportation.

The life equipment and technology system in the *Kebo-keboan* tradition is related to the various equipment used in carrying out traditional *Kebo-keboan* ceremonies, this shows the implementation of efforts to maintain and uphold the traditional values that exist in society.

The various equipment used in the *Kebo-keboan* traditional ceremony are, among others:

- 1) Agricultural equipment, this equipment is used because the traditional ceremony is based on the traditions of the agrarian community, then the various equipment used are: singkal, teter, whip, scythe, hoe, and cingkek.
- 2) *Songsong* is a large umbrella that is used to shade the saint goddess, so as not to get stung by the sun.
- 3) *Sesaji* is the most important requirement of this tradition which if the offerings are lacking, then the ceremony is not perfect. *Sesaji* include *peras*, *tumpeng*, *jenang abang* (red porridge), white porridge, yellow porridge, black porridge, green / blue porridge, *peteteng*, jug, banana leaves, incense, rice, and *pitung tawar*.
- 4) *Tandu* or seat of Dewi Sri, *tandu* is used to seat Dewi Sri during the traditional procession (Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009; Sunjata, 2007).

#### e) Living Livelihood System

The livelihood system of life is all human effort to obtain the goods and services needed. Livelihood systems or economic systems which include, hunting and gathering food, farming, animal husbandry, fisheries, trade.

The livelihood system of the participants of *Kebo-keboan* lives mostly in agriculture so that most of their time is spent in the fields or fields. In general, the crops planted are rice, corn, peanuts, long beans, cassava, mustard greens, cucumbers, and chillies. In addition to farming the livelihoods of the residents of Alasmalang village are traders, livestock deposit is also an inseparable part of the lives of the residents of Alasmalang village. The types of pets are cows, buffalo, goats, sheep, chickens, and ducks (Herawati et al, 2004; Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009).



#### f) Religious System

Religion can be interpreted as a system that is integrated between religious beliefs and practices related to sacred matters and is unreachable by reason. Religious systems which include, belief systems, systems of values and outlook on life, religious communication, and religious ceremonies.

The religious system in the *Kebo-keboan* tradition in Alasmalang and the *Keboan* in Aliyan are related to sacred values and aspects of belief. The *Using* community believes that this traditional ceremony is one of the media of communication with the Creator through the intermediaries of ancestral spirits that penetrate the body of *Kebo-keboan*.

This ancestral spirit is protecting and protecting the condition of their village. Other beliefs contained in the *Kebo-keboan* tradition relate to the welfare and peace of life of the community. The *Using* community believes that the implementation of the *Kebo-keboan* traditional ceremony is a medium for rejecting logs, disasters, and various other negative energies (Salamun, Sumintarsih, Wuryansari, 2015; Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009).

#### g) Art

Art can be interpreted as all human desires for beauty. various forms of beauty that arise from creative imagination that can provide inner satisfaction for humans. Broadly speaking, we can map art forms in three broad lines, namely visual art, sound art and dance.

Art in the *Kebo-keboan* tradition is related to the traditional ceremonial procession of *Kebo-keboan*, the ider earth march. The arts group that lives and develops in Banyuwangi follows the *Kebo-keboan* earth march that surrounds the Alasmalang viillage road. This arts group consists of Gandrung Banyuwangi, Barong Using, Kuntulan Banyuwangi, Reog Ponorogo, and other traditional arts (Muarief, 2011; Siswanto & Prasetyo, 2009).

#### Evaluation of Cultural Relativism in the Tradition of *Kebo-keboan*

Cultural relativism states that culture is the only source of moral rules. All cultures have the same right to life and dignity that must be respected. Cultural relativism depicts good and bad human attitudes depending on the social rules given by tradition. The basic principle of

morality is shown in social rules and is used to base interaction norms (Gensler, 2011).

Cultural Relativism is an ethical concept whose basic teachings are good and bad depending on cultural judgments or social principles that are considered as ancestral heritage. Communities have their respective traditions, customs and culture, which is a good norm for themselves. Cultural relativism cannot justify that other cultures are wrong and tolerance is better. Cultural relativism states that all cultures in society are true. Assessment of the truth of a culture is very dependent on the perspective of each person or group of people.

In the *Kebo-keboan* tradition there is an assessment of cultural relativity in the *Using* community. This can be seen when the *Using* community believes that implementing the *Kebo-keboan* tradition does not conflict with Islamic religious norms. In Islamic teachings we are obliged to give thanks for the blessings given by God who is almighty. The gratitude is manifested through the *Kebo-keboan* traditional ceremony that begins with the village's salvation by means of the community and traditional leaders praying together using local languages and enjoying dishes from their produce.

Praying using the local language known as using language is believed to facilitate prayer quickly granted by the Dewi Sri. Because *Using* community who pray better understand the meaning of ritual prayers sung. In the *Kebo-keboan* traditional ceremony, besides giving thanks through the village salvation, there is also a belief in Dewi Sri as a symbol of fertility. This community trust is related to the composition of the *Using* community the majority who work as farmers. For *Using* community, Dewi Sri is expected to provide abundant harvests and avoid crop failures in the form of *paceklik* and *pagebluk* or deadly pest attacks.

The ceremony of *Kebo-keboan* according to the community outside the *Using* is considered to deviate from Islamic teachings. The forms of these deviations are:

- 1) Belief in the spirits of the ancestors and Dewi Sri who has supernatural powers and can grant their wishes is considered shirk or associating partners with God. In the teachings of God, God is one and there is no need for trust in other creatures who assume that there is a power equal to God or even exceed the power of God. In accordance with the hadith of the prophet

- 2) Pray using local languages. In the teachings of Islam praying is recommended to use Arabic in a sacred place rather than on a village road, according to the hadith of the prophet or the word of God.
- 3) Appearance or behavior such as buffalo and possession are considered insulting or demeaning to the degree and dignity of humans, but the *Using* community believes that carrying out traditional ceremonies by dressing up like buffalo can make their intentions or wishes come true in the form of people's safety, abundant harvests and avoiding pests and disease.

## CONCLUSION

The *Kebo-keboan* tradition is the tradition of the *Using* community in relation to agriculture to ask for soil fertility, abundant harvests, avoiding catastrophes that endanger humans and plants. This tradition is carried out by the community by dressing up and imitating the behavior of buffaloes in the fields with the intention of rejecting the chain of fire by being paraded around the village by the surrounding community. In the past the village of Alasmalang had experienced *paceklik* and *pagebluk*. To overcome this problem, a community leader named Mbah Buyut Karti invited the community to carry out the traditional *Kebo-keboan* ceremony.

Community outside *Using* community assesses the tradition of *Kebo-keboan* is contrary to Islam and is considered insulting or degrading human dignity and status, but the assessment does not affect the existence of the tradition of *Kebo-keboan* which is still being implemented and preserved by the *Using* community, even the district government Banyuwangi participated to package these activities into a slick spectacle and incorporate the *Kebo-keboan* tradition into the Banyuwangi Festival agenda.

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