

Golok Ciomas and Bandrong Practitioner in Banten: Identity and Pride

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Abstract

This study examines the ways in which magic practices have shaped Bantenese identity, the Bantenese response to the shift of the role of these practices in their community and the repercussions it creates when understanding the Bantenese identity authentically. Located in the regency of Banten on the Island of Java, Indonesia, interviews were conducted, dialogues were exchanged, magic rituals were observed, and discourse analysis was applied across testimonies to create this report. This research concludes that in the face of modernity, the Bantenese have moved away from practicing magical rituals solely as an extension of their religion and have included practicing them for the sake of performance and art in attempts to commoditize them.

Keywords: *Identity, Magic, Debus*

A Note on Terms

The abstract nature of our research requires clarification of a few key terms.

1) *Identity*

In anthropology, the term “identity” is often used in the context of “ethnic identity,” implying that it is a frame of reference of the self that “shares certain characteristics [a language, a culture, etc.]” with a group. We define identity as a core characteristic of an individual or group. The Bantenese identity is thus the combination of characteristics attributed to the Bantenese people. The notion of an ethnic identity being collectivistic is most likely the product of colonization, diaspora, and modernity: All concepts that are discussed later. This paper is an exploration of the

attributes that comprise the Bantenese identity, particularly those attributes that originate from magic practices, and how they have changed in the face of modernity. In all instances that we speak about what Bantenese identity is comprised of, we use terms, ideas, and descriptions provided by our participants rather than our own etic perspective.

2) *Magic*

“Magic” is a problematic term to use loosely and a concept that has been taken in a western context to marginalize cultures who practice pre-monotheistic traditions. From western perspectives the concept of magic, rooted in Judeo-Christian heritage, conjures images of witchcraft, cults, deception, and psychological illusions. This study defines the term “magic” as all “beliefs and behaviors in which the relationship between an act and its effect is not empirically or scientifically verified,” in hopes of not idealizing, and simplifying other peoples beliefs. It is important to note that everything we learned about the traditional magic practices in Banten are looked at in relationship to the context with which the beliefs developed and are practiced: including; politics, economics, and history.

A. Introduction

What does it mean to be modern? To believe in boundaries that don't exist? Not just boundaries that separate territories but that separate religion from tradition; Boundaries that separate the concrete from the abstract and one's' ancestors from their descendants. These boundaries, often the spirit behind modern western beliefs, are forcing the people of Banten to commoditize their identity in an effort to sustain tradition. This study was conducted over a period of four weeks on the Island of Java, Indonesia in Banten: A province known among locals for its traditional magic practices and dominant Muslim society. In the face of modernity, the Bantenese have moved away from practicing magical rituals solely as an extension of their religion and have recently included practicing magic for the sake of performance and art. The aim of the study is to explore the ways in which modernity has forced the Bantenese to capitalize on traditional magic practices for performance, the Bantenese response to

such a shift, and the repercussions it creates when understanding the identity of the Bantenese. Some guiding questions include: *In what ways have the magic sciences been regarded as an integral part of Banten's cultural identity?; What is the role of traditional beliefs in making space for contemporary beliefs that deal with politics and economics?; How are ancestral traditions used for socio-economic change and awareness? And What are some of the issues addressed by the practitioners in these communities?*

We will begin with a brief lesson in the history of the origins of magical practices in Banten along with the political and religious context in which they arose. After explaining our methodology, we will present our research findings, identify trends, and delve into an analysis of the results. Our research seeks to open conversation about the way that Bantense identity is influenced by modernity and also kept authentic by the people themselves.

B. Methods

During one of the interviews conducted in the late stages of field research the interviewee confided in us, a story that caused him to become extremely emotional. The tears rolling down his face betrayed his passion. Afterwards, Ernie expressed how grateful she felt to have learned so much from someone from her own community: She was filled with an overwhelming sense of pride in her culture and the people she shared it with. Moments like this clarify several things: Firstly, how incredibly powerful and valuable these personal experiences are as sources of information. The words and emotions behind these undeniably human experiences provide a whole new lens with which to perceive this culture with that academic writing simply cannot provide. Secondly, it shows the authenticity of the experiences of these people and guarantees the validity of the perspectives being given. The more personal the information being shared, the more we connected with the informant and were later influenced in our writing. Lastly, it makes the stories being told of concepts so foreign, all the more familiar. These human displays of vulnerability were constant reminders of the ethics involved when interviewing people.

Given the intrusive nature of ethnography in people's lives, a trusting relationship between all parties engaging in conversation is vital. In many cases, informants give very personal responses in which much deliberation and consideration is taken into what should and should not be shared in our writing. Most importantly, the objectivity, anonymity, honesty, and social and psychological welfare of those willingly participating in the study are considered and appropriately applied. In addition, the aims of the study are well communicated and all questions concerning the dignity and privacy of participants are addressed. Ernie served as not only a fellow researcher but a translator who helped break down cultural barriers to the best of her abilities. I would be at fault to not acknowledge the persisting cultural and linguistic barriers that oftentimes made it difficult for me to understand the words, thoughts, and ideas being communicated. Despite this, it was through observation of day to day interactions and making note of recurring reactions to certain topics of discussion, that I got the appropriate answers to my questions. During the writing period, direct and indirect quotes were revised by Ernie to ensure that the informants words still stand in the context with which they were said.

C. Results

I. Identity and Responsibility

"Now for the intention and purpose, firstly of course we want to preserve cultural values that has been done by our ancestors and owners and creators of Golok Ciomas. And why do we want to preserve this, if not the new generation will only know about it in name. So in the end they wouldn't know the process and everything to do with it. And so it's knowledge and popularity will diminish. This is the reason why we have the responsibility. I have a moral responsibility, as a person from this area, to keep it safe and preserve the cultural values that come with it" (OS, 2019)

From the above quotation, it can be analyzed that the OS has a sense of responsibility as a native son (the identity he has labeled himself) to preserve the ancestral culture of the Golok Ciomas tradition. He revealed that if he did not want the fame of the Golok Ciomas to cease as

history, he therefore had a moral burden to introduce it and develop it as a local wisdom that must be preserved. In line with this, he also revealed his great responsibility as a native son by making books as a way to lift the Golok Ciomas to the public surface that would be useful and enjoyed by many people. From the following quote, the OS also said that it must issue material (money) to publish books and without assistance from the government. If analyzed, what he does is not oriented to the material alone, but rather the responsibility that he holds as the identity of the son of Ciomas and must do his best to preserve the local culture in his area. It turns out that from what the OS says, identity can change someone sacrificing energy and material to maintain that their culture is not eroded by time.

I just hoped that people will get to know about Golok and I also wanted to make something. I just hoped that people will get to know it at first. But that was not enough for me. Even though materially speaking I was at a loss, since I used my own money. At the time, in 2003, I spent around 20 million rupiah to make the 1000 copies. Now it would be more expensive, I was just happy to get my money back because it wasn't a pursuit for profit. But because of that experience I wanted to do more. (OS, 2019)

"People who welcome culture, respect the ancestors are blessed, meaning that the goal is achieved as long as we are sure because the aulia continues to watch us know that her children and grandchildren and vice versa if we betray the struggle of people will not survive." (M, 2019)

What was stated by the OS above, in line with what was revealed by M (as the leader of the Ciomas Golok ritual), he stated that people who welcome and respect the culture of their ancestors are a blessing in Islam, and believe that the ancestors who have died are always watching over the his generation. Even M also revealed that if someone does not preserve their culture (which is good) and does not respect the struggle of the ancestors, that person is considered a traitor and will not be saved.

"This is also the case if someone asks, hoping for a successor, don't know that tomorrow the day after tomorrow must be prepared for the successor, but it's rather troublesome, not only equipped with history but also the verses of the Koran, that's a hassle." (M, 2019)

What the OS revealed earlier is in line with what M said, if one of the things expected in the future so that the Ciomas Machete ritual tradition can still exist and develop is with the successor. The successor is expected not only someone who knows the history and rituals, but people who are able to understand the science of religion as a handle of faith. Identity as a Muslim and at the same time a cultural actor is not an easy thing to practice and explore, M also revealed that there are certain conditions for someone to be a ritual leader and successor to the Ciomas Machete ritual, as follows;

“Especially appointed directly by God, one of the essence of God is yes, there is also a hereditary factor, but not all descendants of ritual experts, and have mastered the alumni and all kinds, because it is not read by selected verses so it is not read arbitrarily, then the conditions are the person must be sincere, honest, honest is not true because of anything, if the goal is wrong maybe not allowed, then let alone age, age must have grown big already so if it's still small isn't it possible yes and the person including yes diligent worship even though not perfect (not perfect) mastering the science of religion is an absolute requirement). If you can, in addition to the hereditary factors, what you read knows their meaning, like Allahah, Allahahah, what is anna, man what man ... know the meaning ... you must not pay the Koran haphazardly.” (M, 2019)

From the above M expression, it can be seen six conditions that must be fulfilled by someone to become the leader and successor of the Ciomas Machete ritual, including:

1. Someone who must have been appointed by God;
2. Of certain breeds;
3. Mastering the usual readings during the ritual (*tawasul*);
4. Have good intentions, sincere, and honest;
5. Mature;
6. Worship Allah diligently and master the knowledge of Islam.

II. Identity as Pride

Identity as a cultural actor breeds a certain pride for the culprit. The following OS expressed his pride as a native son who could read his culture through seminars and presentations at both the national and international levels.

“Well, firstly, we focus on the process of making, or how it is that our ancestors did it in the past, that we keep safe. And to strengthen the socialization, we do it through seminar activities. I have been invited to a seminar in Banten, and also have been invited by the French Consulate to the French Institute of Indonesia in Thamrin City.” (OS, 2019)

The pride is also expressed by the OS in the story as follows:

“And for me personally, this brings me a sense of pride as a person from the area who has the moral responsibility to create something that has value for people and for history. With this the community is backed up, kept safe, and motivated to continue. Usually if no one pushes for it, it becomes increasingly difficult. Moving forward, I hope that this... I was first inspired by Golok Ciomas when I did comparative studies at Candi Borobudur. Over there I learnt that this is a creation of people from 300 years ago, I imagine how many thousands of people or millions even who enjoyed the benefits of its values. So I want to use how I was inspired by Borobudur as an example, although it is impossible for me to live as long as that, that I can still make use of my lifetime to contribute, to make the value. And so I adopt the Golok Ciomas.” (OS, 2019)

OS tells how his pride enveloped him as the son of the Ciomas area to preserve local culture and also do something useful for his region. What he did as a cultural actor and also a preserver, was inspired by his visit to the Borobudur Temple as a tourist attraction that is visited by many people. He also wants if the culture in his area becomes a tourist attraction that can be enjoyed by many people.

Feelings as cultural activists are also expressed by ritual leaders, as follows:

“Yes, how do you feel, a sense of emotion exists, a sense of pride is there, a sense of being accompanied by parents is also present, a sense of being loved by God and the Apostle is also there, complete sadness also exists why is this still just why people are still unconscious, why are they invited to be really difficult

Alhamdulillah accompanied joy, Alhamdulillah my fortune was given the main special task of bringing people with culture to be a pleasure that was not represented by others ... "(M, 2019)

He revealed how much he felt while leading the Ciomas Machete ritual. Even though when he was interviewed he looked tired after leading the ritual, he still seemed eager to express the feeling he experienced, like the emotion he felt when leading the ritual. He said if he felt accompanied by his parents, which was used as a representation that he experienced feelings that were difficult to express as an heir. He also felt a sense of being loved by God and Muhammad as his belief in Islam. He experiences an atmosphere in which all tastes mix at one time which he expresses as a "complete" taste.

"And then, by doing these rituals more and having more attendances, it will for sure be beneficial to the communities. The attendance of owners of Golok Ciomas or other families, this will have an effect on them and the local community as well. Of course by having visitors from outside, since they will need something to drink this will have an effect, even those with home industries or something, this can be pushed for empowering in the end. In the sense of economy there will be empowerment, and hopefully with some beneficial aspects of tourism can influence the community. And it can be a form of cultural tourism for something refreshing. Yeah, something like that." (OS, 2019)

In addition to feeling proud and also feelings that are not expressed by the cultural actors that have been stated above, in the preservation of the Ciomas Golok culture also enters into the realm of very wide benefits to the cultural actors involved and also the community around the ritual. This benefit is felt by the Golok owners as a form of social relations and adds and strengthens friendships and even becomes siblings because of rituals performed together. Then, the benefits can be felt by local people who finally open a business because more and more people are looking for souvenirs and souvenirs from the place of rituals, such as certain craftsmen and certain businesses.

D. Conclusion

Our ongoing research suggests that the Bantenese are not only aware of the commoditization of their culture but also highly considerate of the benefits and detriments it creates for their community. Given that the Bantenese identity tends to operate much like a commons that associates all that carry it, Oman expressed concern that the less fame the important rituals like the Golok Ciomas had, the more limits it would bring to their culture and what they can successfully pass down. Others understand the attempted commoditization as a source of honor, strength and unity. Therein lies the difficulty in assessing the merit of the cultural commoditization: while the “selling of culture” tends to have de-authenticating connotations, it simultaneously reinforces the sense of the community’s value and tradition. Determining cultural “authenticity” thereby becomes a process deeply woven into understandings of tradition, ethics, and social/economic forces.

This research brings to light various Bantenese considerations about the incentives, effects and integrity of magic ritual cultural commoditization but it does not claim to be fully conclusive or all-encompassing. Rather we hope these findings invite further discussion of an issue that demands more research and analysis. Continued research is particularly applicable because of current worries expressing the dissolution of Bantenese culture in the face of Westernization and capitalism. Furthermore, Banten’s breadth of ethnic diversity provides abundant opportunity to compare cultural commoditization across a variety of subjects. The ways in which a culture becomes marketed and commoditized illustrates much about both the culture being commoditized and the culture it is marketed towards.

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