

Cultural Hegemony: White Gown vs Traditional Dress

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Abstract

Traditional dress defines a local identity of a culture, place, tribe, or race. Nowadays, traditional dresses are only worn on some ceremonies such as wedding ceremony and even so, many people do not wear any kind of traditional attire in attending a wedding. Instead, they use the modern one. In this era, women are familiar with the white gown for the wedding. Instead of wearing the traditional dress, they rather choose a white gown for some reasons such as the needs, the condition, efficiency, or interest. However, besides those personal reasons, there are also external factors such as economy, social, and even politics. These all factors happen in one process called globalization. They are connected through the process of globalization. In this process, those factors influence the local identity, which in this case is a traditional dress, in engaged with a white gown. Also, it can be identified whether the traditional dress can survive, or it is replaced by a white gown and what condition in globalization makes traditional dress survive or not.

Keywords

Globalization, white gown, traditional dress, postmodernity

1 Introduction

Talking about local identity in a globalization context, at first, it is necessary to understand the meaning and the concept of both identity and globalization. Identity itself has two kinds of definitions: social and personal.

"In the former sense, an identity refers simply to a *social category*, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, identity is some distinguishing characteristics (or characteristics) that person takes special pride in our views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable." (Fearon, 1999, p. 2)

As the identity regards as the social category, it means the identity of a certain group or ethnicity has been stamped by a certain name or character so they can be differentiated from the other groups. On other hands, what it means by personal identity, it belongs to one person or individual such as name, race, or citizenship and hard to be changed.

According to the definition of identity above, local identity is included in social identity or social category. Referring to the meaning of word "local" in *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, it means "of, relating to, or characteristic of a particular place." Place here might refer

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to “a region, center of population or location where a certain group lives in.” Hence, local identity is an identity belongs to a certain group of people who live in a certain area; which is automatically included in social identity or social category.

Indonesia has many kinds of dresses that can be regarded as a local identity. The first is national dress called *Batik*. People in Indonesia usually use *Batik* attire as their custom in attending some occasions formal or informal, such as wedding receptions, gatherings, parties, and even working. These clothes are also not limited to any places such as school, office, home, and so on. So, though it represents a nation, nation is still a place that has the population, Indonesian people. As a result, it is not wrong to say *Batik* as local identity. Second, mostly every ethnic group has its own traditional dress. However, the complete one is divided based on the region or province in Indonesia. Each of the provinces in Indonesia has its own traditional attire, for example, “Aceh has traditional attire called *Ulee Balang*, North Sumatra with *Ulos*, Riau Island with *Belanga* for man’s attire and *Kurung* for woman’s attire, Lampung with attire made by cloth material called *tapis* and some brass metal as decoration, Special Capital Region of Jakarta with *Betawi* traditional attire, and so on.” (Saddoen, 2018). Commonly, in Indonesia, these clothes are worn on the wedding matrimony or reception. However, at a wedding reception, couples often wear them as one of their attires since in Indonesia reception has two or more customs for one wedding reception.

Nowadays, unfortunately, those attires which represent local identity have to struggle against the modern one. People in Indonesia start to wear a long or maxi dress which has no *Batik* motive at all. Sometimes, there is dress code which makes the guests, instead of wearing *Batik*, has to wear certain clothes based on color for example which has no representation at all the identity of Indonesia or the ethnicities in Indonesia. Besides, those clothes have modified and changed into some kind of modern dress in order to look up to date, as if the traditional dress has out of the date. Even today, women are more familiar with the white gown for the wedding ceremony. Instead of wearing the traditional dress, they rather choose a white gown for some reasons such as the needs, the condition, efficiency, or interest. By wearing a white wedding dress, women are served with many choices in deciding the design of their wedding dress for their wedding ceremony which just happened once in their life.

There are many options to make you different - not opting for the typical “A-line dress”; using fabric uncommon to wedding dresses, or even using a splash of color on your gown. Indeed, there are many things that a modern wedding dress can do to definitely make you stand out. Traditional wedding dresses just have that classic quality.” (D’Italia, 2011) However, if the women are free to choose their own style of wedding dress, so it affects many fields such as economy since making clothes cost a lot of money, making people be outstanding means getting them higher socially, and by getting this “making your own style wedding dress” to be popular, the traditional one has to struggle to survive.

As there counterforce between local identity and the outside identity or modern one, this research will analyze the cultural hegemony done by both kinds of dresses the traditional or the local one and the modern or the outside one. The scope is limited to the attire used by women in a wedding reception in Java, especially Yogyakarta. Those women are bride, bridesmaids, and guests.

2 Theoretical Framework

The globalization process is characterized by two underlying counter forces: “On one hand, economic and technological forces promote similar international points of view, while on the other hands, local cultural and social forces seem to have the perfect effect.” (Kenway & Willis, 2001) It has a deal with the economy, which has a deal with commercialization things, money, and benefit; technology; and industry. This supports the existence of similarity and even sameness among people in the world. On the other hand, local culture and social forces exist to fight against the global point of view and stick with the idea of being different. Hence, both have the power to threaten each other. Modernism is a view which supports the establishment of universal values. The modern period is combined with industrialization, market-oriented capitalist economies, new social classes, democracy, and Enlightenment values reason and progress (Elaati, 2016). On the other hand, postmodernism is a concept which supports the existence of a local culture that people should go back to their ancient. This concept marks the end of the universal point of view. This kind of movement is not limited to the intellectual things but as postmodernism is moving, the resistance of postmodern can be seen through the emergences of arts, literature, and architecture. The deconstruction was the expression to move from the stage of Modernism to Postmodernism.

Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony explains the relationship between culture and power under capitalism. Often Gramsci addresses his characterization of hegemony as the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. The process sounds mechanical: ruling groups impose a direction on social life; subordinates are manipulatively persuaded to board the "dominant fundamental" express." As one of Gramsci's most thoughtful critics observed, hegemony is "a process of continuous creation which, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop." (Lears, 1985) However, it does not stop there, as can be seen in the following passage.

"The concept of hegemony has little meaning unless paired with the notion of domination. For Gramsci, consent and force nearly always coexist, though one or the other predominates... Ruling groups do not maintain their hegemony merely by giving their domination an aura of moral authority through the creation and perpetuation of legitimating symbols; they must also seek to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order. (Lears, 1985, p.568)

3 Results and Discussion

In Yogyakarta, the brides commonly have two or more attires for their wedding receptions. Those attires can combine from the traditional dress such as *kebaya* and *Batik* skirt to white or colorful gown. The design of *kebaya* and *Batik* are varied, they might be "made of cotton, silk or brocade with short or long sleeves combined with *Songket*, *Batik Sarong*, or other traditional textiles." (Wulandari, 2017) The gown also has the various design from white to colorful with any kind of shapes such as ballgown, A-line, mermaid, and so on depends on the body types of the bride.

This kind of tradition, wearing the modern *kebaya* and, let say, white gown, is so different from the early common tradition before. "In its early days, traditional *kebaya* was only seen in the court of the Javanese Kingdom of Majapahit, to be mixed with *Kemben* —a torso wrap worn by noblewomen— for extra cover, following the newly-adopted Islamic teachings. At first, *kebaya* was only allowed for royal family and female aristocrats. But later on, it started to be adopted by commoners." (Wulandari, 2017)

As time flies, technology grows advanced, the changes are not just happened to the wedding dress of the bride, but also the attire worn by the guests and bridesmaids. Before, in Java, the bridesmaid was famous in the name of *Pagar Ayu*, dressed in *kebaya* with the same or similar design and color. But today, they, the bridesmaid or *Pagar Ayu*, can choose their own design and color and it should not be *kebaya* at all. The attire of *Pagar Ayu* can be in any kind of shapes and designs, such as short or maxi dress, with short or long sleeves; one or two pieces of attires, dresses or combination of blouse and skirt; and so on. This also happens with the guest. In the wedding reception, not rare the woman wears a dress in any kind of design. It should not be traditional with the combination of *kebaya* and *Batik*. Some of them usually wear maxi dress combined with their hijab or their upper clothes such as long sleeves blouse with *Batik* skirt. It is so rare to see young women wear *kebaya* when they attend such a wedding reception. It is just the elders who wear traditional dress such as *Kebaya* and *Batik*. Unfortunately, often it has been modified and combined with some new design and color and made of silk or brocade.

As one of local identity, traditional dress, specifically *kebaya* and *Batik*, as it improves to adopt the modern era in order to survive among the rapid of white gown production, tries to survive its existence. Put this on the context: Nowadays, in the modern era, people cannot avoid technology and rapid information. As the information spread, people know anything what is up to date and what is out of the date. Being up to date then become the trend. The question appears: Who make it trending? Society itself is the answer.

Along with the agreement of people, some phenomenon formed and accepted by society. Consensus theory "conceptualizes society as a system of action unified at the most general level by a shared culture, by agreements on values (at least on modes) of communication and political organization. Whereas the consensus model is geared towards the maintenance of the social institution, the conflict model reflects a positive attitude toward changes." (Horton as cited in Lane, 1966) Hence what has been in society cannot be changed by any individuals instead of conflict appears or happened in the society itself. In this case, the appearance of the white gown is a conflict for the existence of the traditional dress since

before society agree to hold on to a certain value to be maintained. But since the white gown came, the tradition changes. However, life is a never-ending story, so it is too hurry to put it on conclusion.

Today is the globalization era, so the role of its process cannot be denied. It has been mentioned above that globalization is a process of two underlying counter forces. Applying the process of globalization in the case of a white gown and traditional dress, it can be said both have their own power to maintain their existence. White gown as part of the modern era is supported by technology and the need of industry and economy world. White gown as it is regarded as part of modern era symbolize the universal view: similarity and sameness. On the other hand, traditional dress support the existence of local culture and social value, maintain the difference and originality. Unfortunately, as it tries to hegemonize "the competition", it is hard for a traditional dress to be dominance towards the white gown.

According to cultural hegemony belongs to Gramsci, domination can be seen through the relation between culture and the power of capitalism. Talking about capitalism means talking about industry and economy, and technology as a supporter. This capitalism exists as supported by the interest of people in production, which means company. This company, in order to gain more benefit, should adapt themselves to the culture exist. They produce things based on the culture of a certain group. Just because they can adapt the needs of certain group it does not mean they are dominance. In other words, the consent of people is needed to achieve hegemony.

"Ruling groups do not maintain their hegemony merely by giving their domination an aura of moral authority through the creation and perpetuation of legitimating symbols; they must also seek to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order." (Lears, 1985, p. 569).

This consent is not suddenly formed in a moment. It has been through some process to be a consensus. The process itself is happened in the society itself, slowly but surely. Before white gown came to society in Indonesia, there must be a process of acceptance by people. Even when they are a sale to the consumer, there must be a consideration before it is sale among those people. Even after it has been promoted to the women, the process of bargaining must be happening. what makes it is accepted is not just the background of the people itself, but the existence of technology itself. When women are convinced by the information

That a white gown is simple, beautiful, and up-to-the-date, then they, the women got an idea and agree that white gown is good for the wedding than the traditional one. When there has been a consensus like that, capitalism just has to maintain its idea through the advertisement or promotion, and technology such as the internet or social media as support. However, life is regarded as a never-ending story. Though white gown hegemonizes the market and the social order, it does not mean traditional cannot survive. "As one of Gramsci's most thoughtful critics observed, hegemony is "a process of continuous creation which, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop." (Lears, 1985, p. 571) There is a possibility that there must be another culture against the developed culture. In order to survive, a traditional dress does not have to resist the production of a white gown. What they have to do to against the existence of modern dress production is adapting the production. The way to adapt to this popular culture, the traditional dress also has to be popular. The criteria of the white gown are produced easily, the design is simple, the option of color varies. Thus, the existence of traditional dress can survive. Unfortunately, the risk behind this adaptation is the value of the dress decreases since the originality is questioned.

Indeed, the traditional dress might be the antagonistic cultural expression of a white gown, but a white gown might be the antagonistic cultural expression of the traditional dress. To see this, it is necessary to see the background of white gown itself. "It began popular when England celebrated the wedding of Queen Victoria in 1840." (Penner, 2004) Today it has been "commercialized by people around the world as the need of economy or capitalism as part of wedding tradition started from the nineteenth century." This can be seen how this modern culture has torn the pieces of the value belongs to a certain group. However, trying not to be judgmental, this cannot be happened if the people of that group can keep maintain the originality value belongs to that group.

4 Conclusions

The white gown and traditional dress will keep maintaining their power to try to hegemonize the market. They are not working as they wish, they work as the need of the people. Their interest will drive their existences. The role of the group owns the traditional dress is just to keep survive the existence of the value to the traditional dress, though it has been modified to another design, can keep survive along with the existence of the group itself. It is because when a local identity of culture exists, the culture will also exist

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