

# Commodification of Religious Tradition (Critical Study on Tourism of Islamic Tradition *Haul* at Pasar Kliwon, Surakarta)

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## Abstract

The policy on tourism development program of Surakarta especially on the calendar of the event takes advantage from religious tradition as tourism commodity. The purpose of this study is to describe the religious tradition haul, the programs by the tourism department of Surakarta, and how commodification through a well implemented marketing communications process, messaging, and other media, as well as responses from the audience regarding the marketing of haul tradition in general toward creating a leading tourism object. Haul which is a tradition for commemorating the death of clerics (ulama) who are followed by some local communities in Surakarta, especially for those in Pasar Kliwon Regency, is utilized in tourism. Through critical study, the cultural values that are supposed to be preserved, changed into marketing values to attract visitors. The used of media are the advertisement and the calendar of events. The local community gain economically advantages from this policy, but they did not object to it socio-culturally. Meanwhile, the tourists are generally interested in haul tradition.

*Keywords: Commodification; Critical Theory; Religious Tradition; Tourism*

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism still becomes one of most prominent regional income nowadays. Since the regional autonomy, the policy provides space for exploring the regional resources in order to increase the locally-generated revenue. Tourism is considered as the 'bait' for the capturing the 'prey', which is the tourist. High appreciation toward tourism objects will emerge through the intensive meaning understanding of the existing object, then socializing it to other parties, and creating many events for enriching the meaning so that it will strengthen the relationship both with the other parties and other purposes such as increasing the income, expanding employment (Widyastuti, 2011).

Some sort of effort has been done by the government to optimize the existing potential tourism objects. Programs for tourism development have also been carried out. Some of them are increasing of tourism attractions through the

discovery and opening new tourism objects, improving the facilities and increasing the cooperation works in tourism. Ironically, the more interesting part of this phenomena is the religious traditions. Religious tradition is a sacred culture which then is performed as a tourism attraction. In terms of tourism marketing, it indeed encourages one party, yet other parties will face the consequences which should be addressed carefully. The critical review of tourism programs is really important for the proportional implementation.

## 2. Method

The study on the tourism industry is indeed interesting to do and discussed both in its conceptual, methodological, and practical. Interesting aspect of the study authors is a descriptive study with a critical approach from the perspective of political economy. The study was conducted in the Pasar Kliwon, Surakarta, where this descriptive study trying to dig up information on one case that is the commodification of religious

ceremonies in the packaging of tourism by the Department of Tourism Surakarta.

Problems and research focus has been determined, this study referred to the descriptive study spikes. Qualitative methods in which the authors used as a study that investigated the troubleshooting procedures performed by describing the situation or the research object (a person, institution, community, etc.) at the present time based on the facts that appear or as their. The data collected mainly in the form of words, sentences or drawings that means more than just the number or frequency (Sutopo, 2002). This method is one of the traditions in the social sciences that is fundamentally dependent on human observation. Therefore, at each stage of the research, the authors gather information through observation and participation in every activity carried out in Pasar Kliwon to obtain information relevant to the issues in the case study would like answered.

### **3. Result and discussion**

Thomas S. Bremer in his writing 'Blessed with Tourist', 2004, states four aspects of defining tourism specifically, showing a close relationship with religious life. Firstly, tourists and religious practitioners both show attention to certain place. Places those interest them are then considered sacred. Secondly, there is specific characteristic of a particular culture. These practices are often overlapping, thus it is difficult to differentiate between tourism and religious activities. Bremer did observations in some religious-based tourism locations, such as in Mexico. Bremer saw that places like Tepeyac in Mexico City, where the Virgin of Guadalupe is, was found that 'pilgrims' (religious practitioner) often participated in activities that can be described as 'tourism practices' those are: posing for a photograph and buying souvenirs. These pilgrims depended on the tour industries that serve any kind of tourist needs such as transportation and communication system, food and lodging, also banking and retail services.

On the other hand, the tourists quite often participate in religious activities when they are visiting religious places. They are actively engaged in liturgy practices (worship/ prayer), they help the pilgrims to see or touch the sacred goods, and they find themselves emotionally by the momentum and religious 'power' in them (Bremer, 2004). The religion system is a religion for the believers. The term 'religi' (religious) is used to substitute the term of religion because it is considered to be

neutral. Every religion is a system consisting of four components that include religious emotion, a system of belief, a system of religious tradition, and religious community (Koentjaraningrat, 2004). Meanwhile, tourism is an activity related to economic issues, social, culture, security, order, and social institution that rules or nature. Tourism activity is based on tourism motivation, some of them are cultural motivation, which is the willingness to know a culture, custom, tradition, and other traditional arts. Tourism study is developed with a multi-disciplinary approach (Lickorish, 1997).

The recent tourism objects that are increasing and raising more visitors are those based on culture and nature which is known as heritage tourism. These objects provide an opportunity for enjoying old traditions. The tourists now think and use their imagination to accept and communicate the messages on the heritage and to construct their views toward historical events (Yoeti, 1990). Tourism itself cannot be separated from political activities of a country where it belongs. In fact, the political tourism activities relationship is described in apparatus activities and governmental organizations in whole form and general perception inscribed in rules, norms, requirements, cautions, and so on which then are given to institutions and organizations to carry out the duties inscribed in them and to interpret it in order to provide facilities needed for the development of tourism industry through tourism policy.

Tourism policy is any action done by government or non-governmental organization that affects the tourism (Pendit, 2002). The enactment of the law No. 32 of 2004 about local self-government, the tourism management is under the local government, creates political actions by the government in tourism. It positively stimulates, but it also brings negative effect since the government appears to be the barrier because of its policy. Tourism policy could not be separated from industrial politics, transportation politics, financial politics, trading politics, cultural politics, social politics, foreign politics, and domestic politics.

#### *3.1. Description of Religious Tradition Haul*

This study was carried out in Pasar Kliwon Regency because that where the *haul* tradition was held in Surakarta. The implementation of this tradition involves the community and government officials in Surakarta. Pasar Kliwon is one of five regencies in Surakarta. Its area is 4.82 km<sup>2</sup> and the population number is

91,222 (data of 2014, [www.surakartakota.bps.go.id](http://www.surakartakota.bps.go.id)), with population density 18,926 per km<sup>2</sup>. Pasar Kliwon nowadays is well-known as the township of Indonesia-Arabic descendants. They usually make a living from textile sales and there is PasarKlewer in this regency, the biggest batik market in Indonesia. Kampung Kauman, known as the Batik Tourism Village, is located in this regency, close to Pasar Klewer.

Pasar Kliwon as a religious cultural product, supported by the majority of the population that are Muslims, used to develop and increase the tourism visit, the government of Surakarta utilizes the religious traditions held by the community which is *Haul*. The etymology of *haul* is from Arabic word *Haala-Yahuulu-Haulan*, meaning one year or term that reaches one year. Culturally, *haul* is the commemoration of the death of public figures, such as sheikh, *wali*, *sunan*, *kiai*, *habib*, and so on which is held once a year on the date of the death to commemorate their services, *karomah*, morality, and virtues. The aspects of this tradition include (1) reciting Quran, *dhikr*, and *tahlil* together, and praying together; during this event, Haul was lead by one of the *Imam* from the Mosque who held this commemorate day. Mosque of Riyadh in the Pasar Kliwon, Surakarta, is become the center of the event, because the tomb of the Holy Cleric (*Ulama'*) was built outside of the Mosque area (2) conducting recitation, religious speech, reading biography and *karomah* of the commemorated figure, and (3) serving food and drinks; the most famous food in the Haul event is *Kabuli*; a rice that mixed with the spices and cooked with a lamb meat. This food is actually a traditional food coming from the Middle East. The purpose of *haul* is to commemorate the service and the struggle of those figures for the community and religion.

### 3.2. Culture Commodification

Critical theory does not aim at finding the truth of a fact, or letting it in its real condition. This theory intends to explain facts as a response for the condition of the society. The final result of critical awareness is a significant change toward the needs that affect the society as they are the source and the actor of this change. In structural critical approach, the dominant process in which some ideas suppress the other is known as hegemony.

Hegemony is a smooth process to make the interests of subordinate groups are subject to the dominant group. In cultural industry concept, Frankfurt school is referring to the way in which entertainment and mass media were the industry

during the capitalism era in post-World War II both in circulating cultural commodity and manipulating human awareness. Marx realized that ideology, similar to religion, is an opiate for the mass. Cultural industry operated in the same way. However, there are two differences. First, religion is a structured doctrine which is arranged in a book or code. It could be studied and criticized. Second, religion promises relief from fear of life after death (Agger, 2009).

Based on the critical theory, culture is no longer something separated, rather it is an expression and experience in which critical understanding can be obtained. Through practical illusion, culture sustains its own commodification, presents expressions and experiences that are uncontaminated by capitalism logics and defends the ability to be different and to think critically. Cultural industry has helped to manipulate awareness that prolongs capitalism which was expected to decrease by Karl Marx. Although Marx states that culture could function ideologically (for instance to analyze religion), he thinks that it will effect more on his analysis on capitalism political-economics. Arguments on cultural industry do not object to Marx's basic principal, which combines capitalism logic with the human relationship that is fetishized, creates benefit from the relationship mystification so that it appears to be natural, setting as if it is natural, which is known as commodity fetishism (Johnson, 2013).

It identifies the commercial-industrial process of a culture that controls the system. Cultural industry is presented in the same ways as the other products in mass production; those are commodification, standardization, and massification. Kellner, 1995 (in Widyastuti, 2011), states that commodification is initially determined by standardization by a group of capital owners in cultural industry with legal market parameters, in which the standard product are well sold in the market and allows production process of the culture massively that causes any kind of culture becomes a commodity. In political economics point of view commodification usually occurs in the commercial forms of which the country states the rules based on the market standard and establish the market rules.

As a result, culture commodification (religious tradition) refers to the changing of religious tradition to become a marketable product. Commodification that is supported by mass media in the form of marketing communications (advertisement) may threaten any norms, values, identities, and symbols of local culture. Slowly, the

values of local culture as inscribed in a certain religious tradition will be shifted and might be substituted by new values. In other words, commodification is the main tool for changing social relations into economic relations.

The modernization process through capitalist development or supporting the capital owners can cause commodification. Commodification is a process associated with capitalism in which the object, quality, and signs are turned into a commodity, something whose sole purpose is to sell in the market (Barker, 2005). A commodity is conceived as a product made for exchange in the market. In other words, a commodity is anything produced for selling. Commodification has covered all tourism aspects and capitalism system. Lury, 1998, suggests that community's orientation of profit causes the creation of various products. Finally, in a post-modern community, a commodity has reached various sectors of life and cultural sphere. The needs of tourism consumption are facing the increase of output, price and wage (income) in production industry that produces things to sell to the tourists (Ardahaey, 2011).

### *3.3. Commodification of Haul Tradition*

The celebration of *haul* receives more attention from the government of Surakarta while developing its tourism. Surakarta has made it the main gate for regional and international associations. It has been shown that Surakarta has intensive cultural interactions with Arabic which are very Islamic. Interaction with Arabic culture provides impulsive touch to increase the potential and becomes the foundation for the cultural development in Surakarta in the future.

The cultural products of Surakarta, especially at Pasar Kliwon of which the majority are Arab descendants, seem to be different from the previous ones through the commodification of that religious tradition. The commodification includes (a) the change of its accessibility that *haul* was initially exclusive, closed, and only for a certain community especially Muslims, but now it is accessible by common people; (b) Place of the event allows men and women to meet and talk to each other. It is also common that during the event people are looking for mates (c) in order to enliven the tradition, the committee open bazaar (night market) during *haul* so that more people are coming to visit and those living in Pasar Kliwon which most of the are trader can earn more. (d) The marketing communication for religious tradition

*haul* or other traditions at Pasar Kliwon comes in the form of brochure, calendar of events, containing attractive pictures other than the pictures of *haul* or other traditions at Pasar Kliwon; (e) The tourism policy by the government about tourism objects causing different perceptions between the local community and the visitors. In other words, the policy is right on the target but needs to be addressed wisely.

Tourism industrialization can be explored by relying on the understanding of the political economy perspective in critical theory. Tourism expansion and penetration cause a negative effect that refers to the calculation of cost-benefit, which party that benefits more from the event. In reality, the tourism industry has played a role as a capitalist instrument. In critical approach, according to Habermas, there is no aspect of life that is free of interest. In critical theory, reality is not interpreted as something as it is and separated from the historical construction, social, economy, politics, and culture. The reality is always built from the constructions shaped in the community. A fact or reality is not stagnant and stopping, rather always moving, changing, and developing. It means that ideology becomes dominant. The ideology constructs reality in order to facilitate the interest of the ruling class. Ideology becomes forgery and all at once becomes the distortion of the social reality that is really happening in the community so that the ruled class can be fooled easily (Littlejohn, 2011).

In a critical theory, reality is not interpreted as something as it is and separated from the historical construction, social, economy, politics, and culture. The reality is always built from the constructions shaped in the community. A fact or reality is not stagnant and stopping, rather always moving, changing, and developing. As a result, the main target of a critical theory of to expose how the ideology of the ruling class in maintained carefully and how the ideology can be objected to cut down the power system that suppresses the rights of certain groups.

The suppressing social structure is real, but may be hidden from people's awareness. People in Pasar Kliwon who most of them belong to the lower economy class, with lower educational level are drifted in the hegemony of the ruling class. It means that people in Pasar Kliwon have joined in a place that is called capitalist community. It is related to the theory of culture which states that capitalist community is dominated by certain ideology by the elite, the ruling class. Cultural

industry has helped in manipulating the awareness, as Marx states that culture can function as an ideology in capitalist political economy view. A Cultural industry that benefits ties the logic of capital and the commoditized human relationship.

The recent capitalism creates pseudo awareness to ensure people through the cultural industry, an industrialization of a culture that is produced massively and commercialized using a system of policy in which it is represented as a commodified mass production. The means of Islamic tradition as a religious thing has become an economical thing (Widyastuti, 2011).

The commodification process is related to some communication aspects. Astrid Susanto (1997), mentions that there are three important aspects related to the effects that occur. Those aspects are: "Media, process, and content that interact each other and indirectly create effectivity pattern." It means that message delivered through certain media will be related to the production process and the transformation the message. When the media change, the process will also change although the content remains the same. This applies to the religious tradition *haul* that is commodified in marketing package. In a capitalist community, commodification affects everyone and everything. Most things tend to be the object and packaged in consumerism culture.

#### 4. Conclusion

In terms of economy social, a community can create more working opportunity (home stay, parking lot, etc.), so that the local revenue will increase. However, the community in Pasar Kliwon who most of them are Arabic descendant is only regarded as an object of the activity. In *haul* tradition, there will be bazaar as a part of the event. It is meant to be one of the attractions for the visitors of Pasar Kliwon. People in Pasar Kliwon

seem to be trapped in recreational and cultural activities that are still repressive since what they do the only diverts men from the introduction of their own alienation.

The Surakarta government through the policy of the tourism department holds the program of tourism development that covers potential areas including the religious traditions done by the surrounding community. The promotions through the newspaper, brochure, local television, or calendar of events distributed by the government, most of them describe the religious activities that are uniquely packed as a typical event from Pasar Kliwon which is very religious.

These kinds of activities are not commodified yet; thus, it benefits capitalism by providing false need when most of the common needs are fulfilled. The existence of religious tradition as a commodity in tourism marketing brings economic benefits as it creates new working opportunities. It is control over people's awareness by a structure that is indirectly realized by the community. Various ways carried out by the government or the community is dominated by the statements of the tourism department that seems to give benefit so that the striking reactions are blurred.

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