

## MARGINALIZATION OF *BEDEKEH* RITUAL PERFORMED BY *AKIT* ETHNIC GROUP IN *RUPAT* ISLAND, BENGKALIS REGENCY, RIAU PROVINCE IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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### ABSTRACT

This present study is intended to explore, identify, comprehend and describe the phenomenon of the *bedekeh* ritual performed by the *Akit* ethnic group in Riau Island, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province in the era of globalization. The *Oang Akit* (those who belong to the *Akit* ethnic group) believe that all diseases are believed to result from the interference of invisible spirits or what is locally referred to as *Antu* (*Hantu*=Ghost), their ancestors, the treatment of other people or what is referred to as *disantet* (black magic practice), and curses. The *bedekeh* ritual is a cultural important element; it is not only performed to stimulate emotion but it is also performed to make the relationship among people and between people and the cosmos in harmony. Globalization has developed human life and changed the people's way of life, including the *Akit* ethnic group. The data in the present study were collected using the techniques of observation, in-depth interview, library research, and documentation.

Based on what was explored and the method used to analyze the data, it was found that the *bedekeh* tradition is still performed by the *Akit* ethnic group; however, its existence is getting marginalized by the internal and external factors. The modern epistemology (Modern-Western) in which rationality is considered more important than other things has caused the therapy performed by the *Akit* ethnic group to shift. Hegemony resulting from the penetration of the culture belonging to the non *Akit* ethnic groups has also caused the *bedekeh* ritual to be marginalized.

Keywords: *marginalization, bedekeh, Akit ethnic group, globalization*

### INTRODUCTION

According to the *Oang Akit* (the *Akit* ethnic people) all diseases result from the interference of invisible spirits or what is locally referred to as *Antu* (*Hantu*=Ghosts), their ancestors, the treatment of other people or what is locally referred to as *disantet* (black magic practice) and curses. This is supported by what is stated by Foster and Anderson (1986:63) that the agents of illnesses can be supernatural creatures (invisible creatures or gods), non-

human creatures (ghosts, the ancestors' souls or wicked spirits, and human beings (magicians). However, based on the naturalistic system, an illness can be explained using impersonal systemic terms, and being healthy results from the balanced physical elements.

The *Akit* ethnic people and their supporting societies have also ready had local knowledge and local wisdom which can be used to overcome the health-related problems. They also use the local knowledge and wisdom they have to treat the health-related disturbances. Apart from being used as a therapy, the *bedekeh* ritual is also the socio-cultural institution of the *Akit* ethnic group which cannot be separated from their socio-cultural structure. It is one of the *Akit* ethnic group's identities and a specific heritage which cannot be found in the other regions. This is in line with what is stated by Giddens (2003: 48-50) that a custom or habit constitutes a personal and collective identity.

The globalized culture has cleaned up every type of social and traditional challenges and local cultures. In addition, it also leads people to the cultural homogeneity which disagrees with the group's identity and value. According to Giddens (2003: 67), globalization brings with it the principle of modern culture leading to different social and civilization problems. When the *bedekeh* ritual is performed, it has its own specifications in terms of the time and place when and where it is performed, the actors who are involved, the language used and the media needed. The contents of the message expressed in the ritual are related to one another. Second, the ritual also contains the ideology used as a model by the *Akit* ethnic people. The ideology is divided into two; they are the cosmological ideology and religious ideology. The cosmological ideology is related to their conception of the process of how the macro cosmos (the universe) and micro cosmos (people) are created, and the religious ideology is related to their conception of the relationship between people and their ancestors and God.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This present study is a qualitative one in which the researcher is the instrument supported with a guide of interview. The qualitative method, which is designed based on the paradigm of cultural studies, is used. The data were analyzed through three stages; they are (1) data collection; the data were obtained through in-depth interview, observation, and library research; (2) analysis and interpretation; (3) the result of data analysis was presented in a narrative way completed with tables and pictures (Straus and Corbin, 2003:9—10).

## **DISCUSSION**

The *bedekeh* ritual has been performed from one generation to another generation. It is still performed as a therapy. *Bedekeh* means 'mendikir' (repeatedly chanting part of the confession of faith as a form of worship) and 'berpikir' thinking of the way of curing the illnesses which the *Akit* ethnic people suffer from. The objectives of performing the ritual are: *first*, curing the illnesses which the villagers suffer from such as cold and the others; *second*, feeding the wild animals that run amuck; *third*, as a compensation by those who have violated the tradition; *fourth*, keeping bad lucks away from the village as someone has made something wrong or cleaning up the village; *fifth*, appointing a new 'Batin' or 'Bomoh' (leader); *sixth*, cleaning up the place where a family whose one of its members is dead and that violates what it mustn't do. The earliest time for performing the ritual performed for the last objective should be 40 days after he/she is buried. Djamari (1993: 36) states that a ritual can be viewed from two points of view; they are the objective of performing the ritual and the way of performing it. From the objective point of view, it is performed in order to be protected, blessed and apologized by God.

Nowadays the *bedekeh* ritual has been marginalized resulting from the internal and external factors. The hegemony implemented by the state through regulations has made the *Akit* ethnic group's survival difficult. In addition, hegemony has also caused people to be culturally homogenous, meaning that the group's identity and value should be avoided. The majority's different hegemonic reasons have caused the *Akit* ethnic people, as a minority, not to be able to enjoy their religious freedom. One of the reasons is that they do not adhere to one of the official religions. They are the followers of the local religion; therefore, they are considered 'not belonging to any religion'. The Malay people have massively converted their religion. Moreover, Islam has been used as their identity. They state that Malay is identical with Islam. The Islamic group uses the mainstream Islamic ideology as their single truth; they disagree with the local *bedekeh* ritual, which, according to them, contains animism, polytheism, and leads one up the wrong path. Such a condition shows that the mainstream Islamic ideology and modernization have dominated the local traditional *bedekeh ritual* performed by the *Akit* ethnic group. On the one hand, there is a high-level consensus using the great national stability as a measurement; on the other hand, the lower class actively supports and accepts the cultural value, idea, objective and meaning which bind and unify them in the existing structure of power (Storey, 2003: 172-173).

The *Akit* ethnic people are frequently stereotyped as being in the outside area (*periferi*) and the lowest social level in the hierarchy of the “Malay world”. They are not considered part of what is referred to as the Malay aristocrat or ‘umat’, namely those who belong to what is stated as ‘the nation of Islam’; therefore, the nation of Malay is not ‘homogenous’. They are not considered ‘umat’ as they do not implement the Malay tradition, they are not Muslims, they do not speak Malay and they look like most Malay people. Such a social structure still affects the Malay society until now. Actually, this degrades the dignity used as the most important symbol in the Malay people’s image of life. The relation between the intellectual and subaltern groups is like the relation between “the slave and his master” (Graves, 1998).

The modern medicine was introduced to Indonesia at the same time as when the western countries expanded their power to Indonesia in general and the *Akit* ethnic group in particular. The rational modern medical world reduces the existence of what is referred to as *bomohs* (the indigenous medical practitioners) who are not rational. According to Gramsci (in Tilaar, 2003: 77), the intellectual plays an important role in society.

Apart from that, education and technological knowledge, information and modernity have also caused the *bedekeh* ritual to be marginalized. Formal education can also cause the way they treat mystical things and supernatural power to shift. The development of knowledge and the modern technology which put forward the economic value, logic and rationality have caused the existence of the oral tradition in society to shift as well. According to Gramsci (in Baker, 2005: 373), hegemony involves education and consensus instead of coercive and brutal strength.

The regional autonomy with the village government system has also affected the *Akit* traditional society; the position of what is referred to as *Batin* has been taken over by the village’s head and his/her staff at Hutan Panjang Village, Rupert District, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province. Simon (2004: 19-20) states that hegemony does not mean the relationship of domination using power, but the relationship of consensus using political and ideological leadership. The shifts mentioned above have caused the *bedekeh* ritual to be marginalized and have been responsible for the cultural gap. In fact, the ritual can relevantly strengthen religion, identity, togetherness, solidarity and human resources who are superior in traditional things.

In addition, the income earned by a *bomoh* is too low. He is inspired by an innermost desire, although what he does is not in accordance with what the young generation wants.

This is in accordance with what is stated by Kaplan and Manner (2000) that the cultural system strongly allows any ritual to be maintained as long as it is functional. The *bedekeh* ritual is an important cultural gist; it does not only stimulate emotion but also maintains the harmonious relationship among people and between people and the cosmos. As far as the relationship among people is concerned, people are reminded of the essence of humanity that there are external strengths which cannot be reached by the human mind.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The impact of globalization is not only related to technology and economy, but it also affects different aspects of life. On the one hand, globalization contributes to different aspects of life; on the other hand, it also significantly negatively affects cultural aspects. It does not only degrade the local cultural values but also causes different cultural aspects, such as the *bedekeh* ritual which has been inherited from generation to generation to get extinct. It is a cultural heritage from the previous generation.

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