



# In the Light of Cultural Studies, the Contest of Javanese Deli Cultural Identity vs. Local Culture

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**Abstract.** Contestation is inextricably linked to “space” as an arena for squabbling over symbols that serve as markers of certain identities. And that identity can be associated with it in social groups. In some contexts, the expression of identity becomes a tool for someone as a member of a social group to realize the group’s common goals. It is interesting to note that the Javanese Deli (currently) who make up the majority of the population in North Sumatra are mostly ex-plantation contract laborers who were brought in during the plantation colonialism period. As a result, when discussing Javanese Deli culture, it cannot be separated from its sociohistorical context. The Javanese Deli cultural identity does not simply appear in the sense that the identity that they currently display and express is something that is given or given. The argument is based on the historical process of their arrival as contract laborers, social and cultural life on plantations, and life outside the plantations, where they face and interact directly with local communities.

**Keywords:** “Cultural Studies” · “Contestation” · “Javanese Deli” · “Cultural Identity”

## 1 Introduction

Deli (Deli Kingdom) refers to both an area (a place) and an element of the local culture (Malay). When discussing the contestation of identities, the Deli as a location is a place where different interest groups can contest their identities, particularly the Malays (the dominant group) and the Karo (pre-colonial); the Malay, Karo, and Dutch-European (colonial); the Malay, Karo, and Dutch-European, Toba Batak, and Javanese (post colonial). Deli has long been a very successful region for agricultural products dating back to pre-colonial times. Because of its enormous and plentiful production of agricultural and plantation products, particularly tobacco, the Deli region is well known around the world.

Due to the region’s wealth and fertility before to the arrival of the Karo ethnic group, which was ruled by the Sultan of Deli, it had conflictive relations with. The area’s control, which is asserted to be the two ethnic groups’ strength, reveals the contestative nature of the relationship. The Malays and the Karo got into a struggle over this land as a result of the tug-of-war of interests. These disagreements are frequently a result of claims to

land that is highly prized economically. The degree of social relations within each of these ethnic groups is demonstrated by the level of power. The taxes imposed on items entering and exiting the Deli Kingdom's borders provide evidence of this. It represents a coercive force that subjugates a group of individuals.

The entry of the Dutch and other European plantation entrepreneurs marked the culmination of the ongoing competitive dynamics. The Dutch furthered the status of the Malays (Kingdom of Deli) in order to increase the amount of plantation land that was leased to plantation business owners. Secondary migrants, like those of the Toba Batak ethnic group who relocate to coastal areas, are increasingly being impacted by the growth and development of plantations (Malay). The Toba Batak ethnic group thus views symbolic or actual reference spaces, which are markers of identity that can be chosen to handle particular situations, as a means of entering the contestation arena. The Toba Batak ethnicity later coexisted with the dominant group, the Malays, and by adopting to Islam and renouncing all prior identities, they became a member of the Malays. They can then engage in competitive conflict over resources (economic or otherwise).

Then, how did the Javanese participate in the arena of conflict in regard to the relations of power and varied interests (Malay-Karo, Dutch-European-Batak Toba) who came during the colonial period as plantation laborers in Deli? The Javanese have been considered persons without a right to life ever since they first came to America to labor on plantations. Because they were unable to negotiate their location or position within the competition room. This was because they were considered lowly and marginalized individuals in the social relations system at the time due to their employment as contract workers. They lack the freedom to express their identity due to their existence in plantation barracks and a rigid system of labour, much alone participate in the ongoing conflict between strong and interested parties.

## 2 Method

This study has a cultural studies perspective, where the process of gathering data is often qualitative. Because social phenomena that are used as sources of study constantly involve humans as active participants or as the cause of social actions that are always loaded with a wealth of meaning, this sort of qualitative research is employed. The Cultural Studies research methodology emphasizes the significance of meaning [1]. The ethnographic approach is one method in qualitative research that is used to collect information to comprehend cultural phenomena and the significance of the acts conveyed by cultural actors. According to Leonardo [2], reading about the migration phenomena that occurs in Javanese people when they are employed as plantation laborers is a highly appropriate way to understand a unique phenomenon like migration (contracted coolies). The migration phenomena that involves Javanese people who are brought in (imported) as contract workers is not a typical migration occurrence. The structure reveals that there are numerous interests, including plantation entrepreneurs, brokers, and labor recruiting service providers, as there was a structured effort made to address the personnel needs of plantation entrepreneurs in Deli (East Sumatra) at that time. The intricacy of these interests can give a broad picture of the numerous perspectives on the migration of Javanese from different places to Deli, enabling an anthropological method to be used to describe and comprehend the phenomenon.

### 3 Discussion

Understanding how the depiction of ethnic culture is used to develop Javanese ethnic identity in the local cultural contestation area is necessary to comprehending the contestation of cultural identity. The concept of representation as a “battlefield” of interests or “power” [3]. In this situation, it is believed that each society’s subjectivity in terms of meaning, emotion, and culture is something that must be defended across a range of interests and power structures. In order to accomplish some objectives, one must fight for their identity. Hall [4] notes that while the past is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth, it is also something that is discussed or taken into account in the context of “cultural identity and diaspora.” A point of identification, cultural identity is a chain developed through historical and cultural discourse. Position politics and identity politics are at war.

Additionally, Raymond Williams argues that everyday culture can be weaved from everyday life, which includes values, conventions, and material or symbolic products. This is from the perspective of meaning. This meaning-weaving process is done collectively rather than individually. Culture is viewed in terms of community and common purpose [5]. Maunati further demonstrates that identification markers can originate from a characteristic that is thought to exist in the relevant culture’s religion, language, and customs [6].

Culture and the idea of identity are interconnected. The culture and subculture in which the community resides and engages can help shape identity. Art is a component of cultural production that can help ethnic groups support it develop a sense of identity. According to this perspective, the weaving of meanings produced in daily life through values, norms, and material or symbolic goods embodied in rituals (wedding ceremonies) can be used as a basis for the Javanese Deli’s cultural identity because the entire process represents values, values and values, norms, and symbolic objects that represent meaning as a collective construction of the Javanese Deli community itself. The underlying meanings serve as a declaration of ethnic identity in interactions with other cultures. So that identity can serve as a reference for group members and point to the same symbol system. Identity theory will be employed in different viewpoints to study how the construction of the Javanese Deli cultural identity is contested with local culture. These views will, of course, be tailored to the perspective being used, namely Cultural Studies. Because it places cultural life in the development of ethnic identity, Barth’s detractors continue to claim that his generative approach on ethnic identity is foundational [7]. In contrast to Cohen, who emphasizes social identification, Barth [8] demonstrates the existence of cultural identification in the creation of ethnic identity. According to Cohen, political processes and change-related processes like urbanization and migration all contribute to the construction of ethnic identity as a whole [7].

The development of cultural identity by the Javanese in Deli through marriage rites has been subject to contestation (adoption) by other local ethnic groups, according to Cohen’s idea [7]. The hall, fresh flour, and marhaban are examples of local ethnic (Malay) culture that was incorporated. This aspect of the local ethnic culture does not just materialize and become accepted; rather, it is adopted after a protracted and contentious process. All types of difference, including the core of reality and the experience of the Javanese Deli, who are former plantation laborers, are rooted in the representation of identity that



**Fig. 1.** Shows the tools employed in the Fresh Flour custom.

is fostered or practiced through marriage ceremonies. The Javanese as coolies try to overcome this marginalization through a traditional marriage ceremony since they are a group that is dominated by and as marginalized as classes and cannot mobilize identity from their life experiences on the plantations of the Javanese Contracting community. It serves as the foundation for the establishment of the family institution and marks the conclusion of the ceremony in the cycle of human life (Fig. 1).

Life in plantation barracks disregards personal space and blurs the lines between male and female relationships, including the values of the institution of marriage, which is highly revered in Javanese culture. As a result, among other things, contract coolies are “isolated” from traditions, particularly the marriage ceremony. marriage (as a symbol of Javanese culture). You can image what happened to these contract workers from Java when they were forced to endure years of living in a culture they had never experienced.

The marriage ceremony is regarded as having the most symbolic contestation arena and confirmation of the existence of Javanese Deli culture out of the other Javanese cultural rituals that indicate how the Javanese symbolize their identity. The marriage ceremony entails the joining of two families, and the procession that is passed is also very lengthy and intricate. As a result, the wedding ceremony is regarded as a cultural document that exemplifies the meaning of the Javanese Deli.

The Javanese in Deli have encountered competition (adoption) over a number of local ethnic cultures in the marriage ritual procession. The hall, fresh bread, and marhaban are examples of local ethnic culture aspects that were embraced. This aspect of the local ethnic culture does not just materialize and become accepted; rather, it is adopted after a protracted and contentious process (Fig. 2).

The marriage ceremony that was performed in the 1960s did not fully exhibit a Javanese identity. This is reasonable because there is no space for the ethnic Javanese ex-contracted laborers to exercise their culture because they have been segregated for tens of years in barracks by colonialists with a rigid work regime. Instead, the mayang twins and the batik clothing worn by the bride and husband are the only emblems used to represent Javanese culture. The utilization of Javanese cultural symbols started to become more



**Fig. 2.** Balai and *Kembar Mayang* and Balai at Javanese Weddings

intricate in the 1980s. Even though they still don't meet the requirements for Javanese cultural rituals, the intricacy (completeness) of the ritual process may be noticed, among other things, in the attire, accessories, and series of ceremonies performed. Even though the ceremonial procedure has been refined as the current standard up until this point, the Javanese Deli is still not very noticeable in the field. In reality, Javanese Deli marriage customs (ex-contract plantations) have a propensity to follow their own rules when performing their wedding ceremonies.

## 4 Conclusion

The aforementioned description demonstrates that there has been a contestative battle for the Javanese Deli (ex-contracted coolies) to demonstrate (again) their identity, both with other increasingly complicated local ethnicities and among educated Javanese. As an expression of Javanese Deli identity, Javanese culture is being recreated and recreated by Javanese Deli people. The essence of truth, the differences in kind, and the experiences of the ex-plantation workers known as the Javanese Deli are all underpinned by the representation of identity practiced in marriage rituals. The Javanese, known as coolies, attempt to overcome this marginalization through marriage ceremonies, which serve as the foundation for the establishment of family institutions and serve as the culmination of ceremonies in the community. However, because they are marginalized and subordinated groups that cannot mobilize identity from their life experiences on plantations, they are forced to live in poverty. The cycle of human life As a result of cultural traits exhibited in social connection with other cultures or "otherness" as a definition, Javanese Deli culture was established as a symbolic resistance attempt. To put it another way, cultural traits are employed as cultural symbols and turn into images of one's own identity that are addressed in relation to both space and time within the context of a brand-new, unique region of history and culture.

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