



The Existence of Warak Ngendog as a Symbol of Identity and Cultural Heritage in the Social Environment of Semarang Society

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the existence of Warak Ngendog as a symbol of identity and cultural heritage in the social environment of Semarang City. Warak Ngendog is seen as a result of acculturation between Javanese, Arab, and Chinese cultures, reflecting the values of tolerance, unity, and togetherness in a multicultural society. This study also seeks to explain how the social environment plays a role in preserving the meaning and philosophical values of Warak Ngendog amid the currents of modernization and globalization. The method used is a normative juridical approach with descriptive analytical specifications. Primary data was obtained through observation and interviews with indigenous peoples and cultural communities in Semarang, while secondary data was obtained through literature studies, laws and regulations, and related scientific literature. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively to find the relationship between the Warak Ngendog symbol, customary law values, and the socio-cultural dynamics of society. The results of the study show that Warak Ngendog plays an important role as a symbol of unity and identity for the people of Semarang who live in a pluralistic social environment. This tradition not only functions as part of religious rituals in the Dugderan celebration, but also serves as a medium for social cohesion among residents of different ethnicities and religions. Warak Ngendog has undergone a transformation from a ritual symbol to a cultural icon that plays a role in the arts, creative economy, and city branding. However, research has also found a shift in meaning due to commercialization and a lack of cultural education among the younger generation. Therefore, the preservation of Warak Ngendog requires collaboration between the community, government, and academics so that local wisdom values are maintained. Thus, Warak Ngendog is not only an intangible cultural heritage, but also the foundation for the formation of a harmonious and civilized social character in Semarang.

Keywords: Existence; Warak Ngendok; Social Environment.

1 INTRODUCTION

The city of Semarang is known as one of the regions with a unique cultural heritage deeply rooted in the history of the coastal communities of Central Java. Its strategic geographical location as a port city has made Semarang a meeting place for various ethnic groups and cultures, such as Javanese, Arab, and Chinese. From this meeting, various traditions and cultural symbols were born that represent the social harmony of the community. One of the icons that best reflects this cultural acculturation is Warak Ngendog, a distinctive symbol that has become strongly attached to the identity of the people of Semarang [1].

Warak Ngendog is not only known as part of the Dugderan celebration ahead of Ramadan, but has also developed into a symbol of cultural identity that marks the multiculturalism of Semarang City. Its shape, which consists of a combination of three mythological animals, namely goats, dragons, and camels, symbolizes the diversity of ethnic groups that live together in peace [2]. Through this symbolism, Warak Ngendog represents the spirit of tolerance, unity, and togetherness that characterizes the people of Semarang.

The Dugderan tradition itself is the main platform for the emergence of Warak Ngendog as a cultural mascot. During the celebration, Warak Ngendog is paraded through the main streets of Semarang as a form of respect for the history and beliefs of the community [3]. This tradition is not only ritualistic but also social, as it involves various segments of society, both locals and migrants, in a shared cultural activity. From this, it is evident that Warak Ngendog is not merely a cultural artifact but a living symbol within a dynamic social environment.

In the context of customary law and customary law communities, Warak Ngendog is part of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage recognized by the local community. Its existence reflects the relationship between humans and traditional values that have been passed down from generation to generation. As part of intangible heritage, Warak Ngendog not only has a physical form, but also contains moral, spiritual, and social values that guide the lives of the people of Semarang.

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L. R. Sugiarti et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Social Environment Diversity (ICOSEND 2025)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 1011,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-565-2_42

The development of Warak Ngendog over time shows a process of adaptation to social change. The form and meaning of Warak Ngendog are now not only found in cultural processions but also present in various aspects of community life, from dance, batik, to the city branding of Semarang. This transformation indicates that local culture is able to adapt without losing its identity.

On the other hand, rapid social changes due to modernization also pose challenges to the preservation of local cultural values. Modern society tends to view Warak Ngendog only as a visual icon or economic commodity, rather than a spiritual and social symbol. This raises concerns about the loss of the philosophical meaning behind the symbol.

The role of the social environment is important in maintaining the sustainability of Warak Ngendog. The social environment, which includes family, educational institutions, and cultural communities, acts as agents for passing on cultural values to the younger generation. Without the active involvement of the community, Warak Ngendog risks undergoing a shift in meaning that is limited to aesthetic and economic aspects.

As part of a pluralistic social environment, the people of Semarang demonstrate a high degree of adaptability in accepting cultural differences. This openness is evident in how Warak Ngendog is accepted across ethnic and religious lines as a shared symbol. In a multicultural society, Warak Ngendog has become a symbol of tolerance and social harmony that binds all elements of society together.

In the context of legal culture, recognition of the existence of Warak Ngendog is also in line with the principle of recognition of customary law communities as stipulated in Article 18B paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution. This culture is clear evidence that customary communities have their own system of values and laws that exist within society and are recognized by the state. Thus, Warak Ngendog can be seen as a manifestation of the cultural rights of customary law communities in Semarang.

Warak Ngendog is not only a cultural heritage, but also an educational medium that teaches moral values to the community. In its philosophy, Warak Ngendog teaches self-control, purity of heart, and harmony among human beings [4]. These values are very relevant in shaping the character of modern society, which is being eroded by globalization and individualism.

Through community involvement in various cultural activities such as festivals, carnivals, and art exhibitions, Warak Ngendog becomes a means of strengthening social relations among citizens. This process of interaction builds solidarity and reinforces the role of the social environment as a forum for cultural identity formation. Thus, the existence of Warak Ngendog is not only seen from a symbolic aspect, but also as a tool for social cohesion [5].

The Semarang City Government plays an active role in strengthening the existence of Warak Ngendog through cultural policies and tourism promotion. The use of Warak Ngendog as a city branding logo with the tagline Variety of Culture shows efforts to emphasize the city's diverse identity. However, it is important to remember that cultural promotion should not only be economically oriented, but should also focus on preserving the social and cultural values contained therein.

The social environment of Semarang, which is open to change, is an important factor in maintaining the relevance of Warak Ngendog in the modern era. Interaction between the younger generation and local traditions needs to be strengthened through formal and non-formal education. Learning about local culture in schools, for example, can be an effective medium for instilling local wisdom values from an early age.

In addition, cultural communities and artists also play a strategic role in preserving the originality of Warak Ngendog. They serve as culture keepers who ensure that cultural transformation does not eliminate its philosophical essence. Collaboration between artists, academics, and the government is key to creating continuity between tradition and innovation.

Warak Ngendog, as a symbol of identity, also plays a role in strengthening the community's sense of belonging to their city. When people feel proud of their cultural heritage, they will be motivated to preserve it. This sense of belonging is important for building collective awareness that local culture is part of the nation's identity.

The existence of Warak Ngendog in the social environment of Semarang also shows how a cultural symbol can become a bridge between generations. The values inherited through Warak Ngendog not only teach about tradition, but also about how humans interact in a diverse society. Thus, Warak Ngendog functions as an intergenerational medium in shaping an inclusive society.

The challenges that arise in the era of digitalization demand innovation in the preservation of Warak Ngendog. The presence of digital media can be an opportunity to expand the reach of these cultural values, for example through educational content, documentaries, or social media. However, digitalization must also be carried out with caution so as not to reduce the sacred meaning attached to this symbol.

In the social dimension, Warak Ngendog shows how culture can serve as a unifying force amid diversity. This tradition is capable of breaking down social barriers and creating a space for harmonious interaction between community groups. Therefore, the preservation of Warak Ngendog is not only the responsibility of the government, but also of all elements of society living within it [6].

Ultimately, Warak Ngendog is a reflection of the balance between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, it represents the noble values of local culture, and on the other hand, it demonstrates the community's ability to adapt to the changing times. Its existence in the social environment of Semarang is clear evidence that cultural heritage can remain alive if it is preserved through collective awareness [7].

Thus, research on the existence of Warak Ngendog as a symbol of identity and cultural heritage in the social environment of Semarang has high academic and social urgency. This study not only contributes to the development of customary law and cultural anthropology, but also provides a foundation for strengthening national character through the preservation of meaningful local culture.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a normative juridical approach with descriptive analytical research specifications. The normative juridical approach was chosen because the research focuses on analyzing applicable legal norms, especially those related to the recognition and protection of customary law communities and local cultural values that exist within Semarang society. Through this method, the researcher examined various laws and regulations such as Article 18B paragraph [2] of the 1945 Constitution, Law Number 5 of 1960 concerning Agrarian Principles, and Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, which form the legal basis for the recognition of the existence of Warak Ngendog culture as part of tangible and intangible cultural wealth. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between culture and customary law as a system of values that lives in society [6]. In collecting data, this study used two types of sources, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through field observations and interviews with the indigenous people of Semarang and cultural communities involved in the preservation of Warak Ngendog. Secondary data was obtained through literature studies covering literature, previous research results, scientific journals, and relevant legal documents. All data were analyzed using qualitative analysis methods, namely by systematically describing the findings to find the relationship between the Warak Ngendog symbol, cultural identity, and the social dynamics of the Semarang community. The results of this analysis were then interpreted logically and comprehensively to answer the research questions and strengthen the understanding of the existence of Warak Ngendog as a symbol of cultural identity in the context of customary law and social community.

3 RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the study show that Warak Ngendog has a very important position in the social and cultural life of the people of Semarang. It is not only a symbol of tradition in the Dugderan event, but also a symbol of identity and a reflection of the local wisdom of a multicultural coastal community. From various field data and literature, it was found that the people of Semarang understand Warak Ngendog as an icon of the city that represents the values of tolerance, unity, and a spirit of togetherness amid ethnic and religious diversity [3].

Historically, Warak Ngendog emerged from a mixture of Javanese, Arabic, and Chinese cultures. Its unique form illustrates the integration of these three cultures: the goat's head symbolizes Javanese culture, the camel's neck reflects Arabic culture, and the dragon's body represents Chinese culture. This fusion shows how the people of Semarang have successfully built an inclusive collective identity amid differences. Thus, Warak Ngendog is not only a traditional work of art, but also a social symbol that unites various communities in a shared cultural consciousness.

In the Dugderan tradition, Warak Ngendog is the center of attention for the community. The ritual is held every year before Ramadan and has become an important part of the life cycle of the people of Semarang. The Warak Ngendog parade from City Hall to the Grand Mosque of Central Java involves the participation of thousands of residents [8]. This shows the high level of social involvement that strengthens solidarity among residents. This activity also serves as a public space where the community can openly express their local identity and values.

From interviews and observations, the majority of the community interprets Warak Ngendog not only as part of a religious tradition, but also as a moral symbol. Warak is derived from the word "Waro'a," which means to restrain oneself, containing a spiritual message to control one's desires during Ramadan. Meanwhile, the egg (endhog) that accompanies Warak is a symbol of the rewards or blessings obtained after refraining from bad deeds [9]. This symbolic meaning shows the depth of ethical and religious values contained in local culture.

The study also found that Warak Ngendog has undergone significant visual and functional transformations. Whereas Warak Ngendog used to appear only in religious rituals, it now appears in various forms, such as sculptures, batik, dances, government logos, and souvenirs typical of Semarang. This transformation shows a cultural dynamic that is adaptive to the times without losing its philosophical meaning.

One notable form of adaptation is the emergence of the Warak Dugder dance, which is adapted from the philosophy of Warak Ngendog. This dance is not only performed at Dugderan events, but also at various cultural

festivals at the national level. Through this dance, the values of mutual cooperation, solidarity, and togetherness of the Semarang community are presented again in the form of a performing art that is easily accepted by the younger generation.

Apart from dance, Warak Ngendog is also immortalized in Semarang batik motifs. Warak-patterned batik depicts a combination of colors and symbols that represent the diversity of Semarang's community. Initially, this batik was only produced ahead of Ramadan, but it has now become a popular product that reflects the community's pride in its cultural identity. This shows that local cultural symbols can play a role in strengthening the creative economy without losing their historical value.

The Warak Ngendog visualization is now also featured in Semarang City's branding. The city government has adopted a logo titled "Variety of Culture" with an image of Warak Ngendog as a representation of the city's rich culture. In this context, Warak Ngendog not only serves as a symbol, but also as a tool of cultural diplomacy that introduces the character of Semarang's people to the national and international public.

However, the study also found a shift in meaning among modern society. Some people, especially the younger generation, know Warak Ngendog only as a tourist icon or commercial symbol without understanding its philosophical meaning. The lack of cultural education in schools has caused the original values of Warak Ngendog to be neglected. This shows the need for cultural education revitalization to revive awareness of local heritage.

In interviews with several cultural experts, concerns were raised about the increasingly diverse forms of Warak Ngendog and the lack of standard visual guidelines. Some modern forms are considered to have strayed from their original philosophical values. Cultural experts worry that if this condition continues, future generations will only know Warak Ngendog as decoration without cultural meaning.

However, on the other hand, this diversity also shows the creativity and active involvement of the community in preserving this cultural symbol. Many artists, craftsmen, and cultural communities are innovating by creating various Warak Ngendog-based works such as paintings, miniatures, and digital animations. This phenomenon shows that cultural preservation does not have to be static, but can keep pace with technological advances and the times.

From a social perspective, Warak Ngendog has become a tool for social cohesion that strengthens the sense of brotherhood among citizens. The Dugderan tradition, which is the main platform for the emergence of Warak Ngendog, brings together people from various social strata regardless of religious or ethnic differences. In this activity, the community unites in a spirit of togetherness and joy. This shows that culture plays an important role in building social integration in a heterogeneous society [2].

The social environment of Semarang, which is open to change and diversity, is a major factor in maintaining the existence of Warak Ngendog. This tradition remains alive due to the active participation of residents, educational institutions, and the government [10]. Intensive social interaction in various cultural activities keeps Warak Ngendog relevant in the midst of modernity.

The study also found that Warak Ngendog has customary law values implied in its cultural practices. The values of mutual cooperation, respect for ancestors, and obedience to social norms are tangible forms of customary law that exist in Semarang society. Thus, Warak Ngendog is not only a cultural symbol, but also a manifestation of an unwritten legal system that maintains social balance.

In addition to its social and cultural impact, the existence of Warak Ngendog also contributes economically to the local community. Products featuring the Warak Ngendog theme, such as souvenirs, clothing, and artwork, have become part of the creative economy sector. This strengthens the position of local culture as a sustainable economic potential if managed properly.

In the context of tourism, Warak Ngendog has become a major attraction in the city of Semarang. Tourists who come to this city are not only interested in culinary delights and historical sites, but also in the iconic cultural symbol of Warak Ngendog. Festivals with a Warak Ngendog theme have succeeded in enhancing the city's image while strengthening public awareness of the importance of cultural preservation.

However, there are still obstacles in managing and documenting the Warak Ngendog culture. The lack of official archives and previous research has resulted in a shortage of comprehensive reference sources. This poses a challenge for academics and the government to compile systematic documentation so that these cultural values can be passed on intact to the next generation. From the results of the study, it can be concluded that the existence of Warak Ngendog depends on the synergy between the community, the government, and cultural actors. Without the active involvement of these three parties, the preservation of this culture will be difficult. The government plays a role in policy and promotion, the community as cultural actors, and academics as developers of scientific studies that strengthen its theoretical basis [3].

The overall findings of this study show that Warak Ngendog is not only a visual icon or part of folklore, but also a living cultural entity that reflects the harmonious relationship between humans, traditions, and their social environment. The values contained within it, such as tolerance, unity, and self-control, are an important foundation for the formation of a cultured and inclusive Semarang community. Thus, the results of this study confirm that the preservation of Warak Ngendog is not only the responsibility of artists or cultural figures, but a moral

obligation of all citizens of the city. Through cross-sector collaboration and a deep understanding of cultural significance, Warak Ngendog will continue to live on as a symbol of identity, cultural heritage, and social cohesion for the people of Semarang, both now and in the future.

4 CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the social environment of Semarang society plays a central role in preserving Warak Ngendog as a symbol of local identity and cultural heritage. The community's openness to ethnic and religious differences makes Warak Ngendog not only a symbol of tradition, but also a unifying medium that reinforces the values of tolerance and togetherness. A harmonious and inclusive social environment allows this tradition to continue to thrive amid the tide of modernization, as the community remains actively involved in various forms of preservation—from cultural activities and performing arts to teaching local values in the family and school environments. Thus, Warak Ngendog reflects the success of the Semarang community in integrating tradition, morality, and social life in a sustainable manner. Based on these findings, the Semarang City government needs to strengthen its local cultural preservation policies through a more participatory and sustainable approach. The government is expected not only to make Warak Ngendog an icon of tourism or city branding, but also a means of social education that instills local wisdom values in the younger generation. Concrete efforts can be made by integrating Warak Ngendog culture into the education curriculum, empowering cultural communities, and supporting artists and the creative economy based on local traditions. With synergy between the government, community, and academics, Warak Ngendog will continue to live on as a cultural heritage that not only strengthens the city's identity but also reinforces social harmony in Semarang.

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