

Colonial Mechanism on Plantation Organization

Case Study of Women Worker Marginalization in West Java Plantation

Roro Retno Wulan

Faculty of Communication & Business, Telkom University
Bandung, Indonesia

rorowoelan28@gmail.com & rorowoelan@telkomuniversity.ac.id

Abstract - This paper engages in a controversy that colonialism does not end although the colony had been declared their freedom; it still exists across time. The residual effect of colonial domination in Indonesian culture can be proved in plantation areas. The victim from this colonial mechanism is women labor. Colonial culture imposed on them constitutes a large portion of the field of study for postcolonial critics. This paper examines colonial mechanism as part of the organization communication and tries to reveal women labor experience in postcolonial paradigm. Using Deetz' Corporate Colonization Theory this research pays attention to political relationship to women, using historical background and social constructionist view. Deetz's theory proposed that the development of more participatory conceptions and practices of communications is a core in the working environment and is based on tie meaning in religion, family and community. As a qualitative research with phenomenological perspective, the primary data were collected through field observations and in-depth interviews with twelve tea picker women in a West Java plantation area. For six months the researcher constructed the meaning of working in the colonial mechanism. In the constructivism paradigm of communication, data validation is gained from source triangulation technique. For the conclusion, the researcher finds that colonial mechanism constructed through corporate culture is special in daily conversations and corporate norms. Historically, oppression on tea picker women's life has been inherited since the Dutch colonial era. This research reveals that women never had a chance to pursue their choices. Their life is only in the tea plantation area, working and raising their family there. It is recommended that future research could help tea picker women to be more independent to see and choose the best for them.

Keywords: *organizational communication, postcolonial, women labor, marginalization, corporate colonization theory.*

"over vrijen arbeid in Nederlandsch Indie, en de tegenwoordige koloniale agitatie" (Multatuli, 1862)

I. INTRODUCTION

The economy interdependence between one country and other countries has been created a long time ago. Weather conditions and natural environment of each country is different and of course to meet all the needs of their society, they need goods from other countries. This is the principal base of the emergence of imperialism. Selfishness of great countries to attempt and master the world's economic resources indicates its superiority over other countries.

Selfishness makes some countries become inferior, colonized and till now has not been able to control its economic sectors independently.

Since Said's era until now, postcolonial see inequality, injustices and domination of cultural ideology. This is the main purpose of poscolonial study as Spivak [1], Mohanty [2], Gandhi [3], Loomba [4], Guha [5] and Bhaba [6] were doing. Postcolonial focused on the society that seeks to make a process of generating awareness of Western hegemony that has been occupied until now; even the colonial era has been passed since a long time ago. The interesting aspect of this study is the resistance effort from tea picker women in their daily life to the tea plantation ruler. Although they have not realized the condition, actually they have been able to awaken from the hegemony of colonial times. The set of mentality as a marginalized group have been formed since a long time ago. The mentality was formed by the pattern of work organization inherited by colonial ruler.

In this research, the researcher tries to explore the question of controversy that colonialism has not ended in Indonesia, especially the plantation community. The residual effect of the Dutch colonialism remains in the community and shows their communication pattern. As an organizational communication research, this research will describe the aspects of colonial mechanism on organization structure and daily speech. It is very different from several earlier journals which have been discussed regarding the postcolonial perspective. In previous research conducted by Odeh [7] and Newell [8], they saw postcolonial perspective in Iran, England and also other countries. Another research that is similar to this research as conducted by Kim [9] & Nishahani [10] saw the conception of cultural identity and speech in poscolonial studies. This research uses postcolonial perspective in Indonesia, and focuses on the life of tea-picker women as subaltern in plantation community.

There are two main perspectives in assessing organizational communication [11]. First refers to objective view. The focus is on handling the messages. The second focuses on the creation of meaning on the interaction of organizational units. To reveal the phenomenon on the life of tea-picker women under the hegemony of Dutch colonialism the researcher used subjective perspective. The research sees the tea picker's life have been marginalized by the organizational structure of the plantation during their

life. This condition is related to how organizational members will behave depending on the meaning of that relationship for them. In the perspective of communication management, an organization work shows how the arrangements of communication between members indicate the structure, position, and power of each member. In an organization, communication has four functions like the function of controlling the member, the function of raising worker motivation, the function of expressing emotion, and the function of deliberation and decision making.

In the organization perspective, how the working environment appears will affect the behavior and decision-making processes of its members because of the intense communication that has existed for a period of time. As described above, communication plays an important role in controlling the behavior of the members' work. The fact was revealed from the unchanged condition in the organizational structure of the plantation. The other is the using of Dutch designations. Therefore, this study aims to find deeper into the conditions of the perpetuation of the colonial mechanism for workers women tea pickers in the study of organizational communication. The purpose of this study is described as follow: how the structure of colonial mechanism remains in the plantation community and how daily communication runs on the life of tea picker women.

II. THEORY AND METHOD

A. Organization Communication Management

By definition, organization is a unit of social organization that coordinated intentional, consisting of two or more functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a goal or set of goals [12]. Thus the activities of the organization have a fundamental role in making patterns or blueprints for members of organizations to carry out activities in the organization of work. The pattern can be formed through a communication agreed for the work done in the organization. The process of communication in the organization is to determine the effectiveness of the organization [13]. To achieve its objectives the organization implemented the role to any person who is a member. The roles were then operationalized into a task and the work function. Operationalization of the tasks and functions are diverse and stratified and shall be adjusted to the position that is both structural and functional, as well as showing the position and authority of the person in the organization of work.

B. Postcolonial Theory

The essence of postcolonial theory describes the process of resistance and reconstruction that is continuously done by the East. Postcolonial theory explores the experiences of oppression, resistance, race, gender, representation, migration, history, philosophy, science, and linguistics. Postcolonial studies also offer a critical understanding and seeks to reveal Eurocentrism, imperialism, colonialism and decolonization in the former colony society. Edward Said [14] in his book "Orientalism" (1978) discusses postcolonial discourse which sees that the world is divided into two binary oppositions, "we are human" and they are not human.

Eastern people are considered wild and uncultured. Therefore, in the study of Communication Sciences postcolonial theory is in the realm of critical theory. Cited from Littlejohn & Foss [15] "*These theories are concerned with how power, oppression, and privilege are the products of certain forms of communication throughout society, making the critical tradition significant in the field of communication theory today*".

The subject of this research is women labour who in postcolonial view belongs to postcolonial feminism area of study. Postcolonial feminism works on women in the third world, unveiling the oppression and domination that happened in their life since colonization years. Using the postcolonial feminism theory, this research tries to depict the colonial mechanism in the tea plantation organization. This mechanism was built by the colonial planters in 18th century and still working until now. The organization believes this is the most suitable structure to run the business.

Postcolonial theory is part of critical theory which tries to reveal the negative effects caused by the colonial era. The consequences mean more and lead us to mental degradations over the material damage. Similarly, in relation to Feminism, the theory is leading to the deliberation of women from the negative effect of colonialism. Women in Third Country experienced two masteries over herself, both patriarchy culture and colonialism. As we understood, Indonesia had feudal era when the kings ruled. This feudalism transformed as patriarchy, and ruled women to become second citizen in their country. After the Dutch ruled, women suffered double burden, from patriarchy and colonial rulers. It is the point when Indonesian women became meaningless.

C. Corporate Colonization Theory

In the 1980's many scholars began to highlight subjectivity in a communication organization. They pay attention to the cultural life of the organization. This view brings the scholar to look at how they were communicatively constructed. This idea led the scholars to critical approach that enables them to understand power, hegemony, ideology and systematically distorted communication. In Habermasian term, systematically distorted communication refers to the instrumental manipulation of language by the systemic interests of money and power that result in the corruption of the lifeworld [15].

As a part of the critical approach theory; this theory shows us how the communication practices in organizations that undermine fully representative decision making is, and thus reducing the quality, innovation and fairness of the company policy. Deetz says that corporations "control and colonize" modern life in ways that no government or public body since the feudal era ever thought possible. Yet the fallout of corporate control is a sharp decrease in human quality of life for the vast majority of citizens. Deetz also suggests that "we need to consider in depth what type of 'business' this is, who the moral claimants are, how privilege is organized, and what the possible democratic responses are" [16]. He wants to examine communication

practices in organizations that undermine fully representative decision making, thus reducing the quality, innovation and fairness of company policy. All corporate information is an outcome of political process that are usually undemocratic and have consequences that usually hurt democracy. Deetz presents a communication model that regards language as the principal medium through which social reality is produced and reproduced.

D. Methods of Study

To examine the reality of life as a whole, we cannot do it only through the experience of the individual person, but it must be considered as a study that focuses on relationships between individual members and the communities. Life itself is composed of units; both individuals and groups are interlinked in a network of mutual support and complementary; thus, it cannot only be viewed from one side. We need to interpret the situation and the context of their relationship with the plantation company. What is the communication that had been built by the ruler and the workers was like. Behind it, there is an attempt to look at the meaning of being workers on plantations as an identity. Moving on from this thought, the researcher sees the process of women marginalization in the plantation life which can be explained and the relationship with the colonial mechanism that can be revealed.

Qualitative researchers use theories in this research with different objectives, according to Creswell [17]; first, the theory is often used as an explanation for behavior and certain attitudes. Second, qualitative researchers often use a theoretical perspective as a general guide to researching gender, class, and race (other issues concerning marginalized groups). This perspective is used in research advocacy/participatory qualitative and may help researchers to design the formulation of the problem, collecting and analyzing data, as well as forming the call for action and change (call to action and change). Third, the theory is often used as the end point of the study. It means that researchers apply inductive research processes. The process starts from the last data collection to general themes, and then to the theory or model.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From October 2014 until June 2015, this research was conducted in several areas of tea plantations in West Java, such as Malabar, Ciwidey and Subang. This research examines the aspects engaged in tea picker women life using participatory observations. For eight months, all aspects in their life that has been dominated by the colonial mechanism was observed.

A. Plantation historically condition

Topography and fertility of Parahiangan land has invited foreign investors since the colonial periods. Those colonials arrival bringing colonial values and fundamental in Indonesia. This affected the livelihood of the local communities. Historians have recorded several families who developed tea plantation in Priangan, such as Hucht, Kerkhoven, Bosscha, Holle, Denminghoff Stelling, and

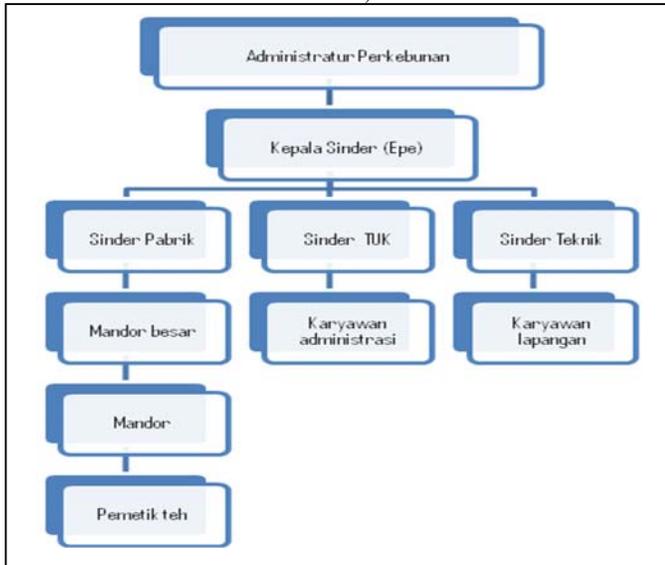
Motman. These families were interconnected by marriage and built the dynasty is known as "The Preanger Planters" (1827). These planters became small kings in the rented areas. Some evidence like photographs, writings and buildings show the egocentric of Preanger Planters, including how these white planters made the local women their "nyai" (concubine). Most of the children were neglected by their white father. However, there were lucky ones who were taken care by their fathers and brought to the Netherland.

From the passage above the life of tea picker women is historically related with the control of land. The domination of the land has an implication on the domination of women life, in public or domestic area. Feudalism and colonialism made women life worse day by day. Women as second-class citizens have never had the opportunity to choose their future. They cannot go to school, work in public area except under the permission of their men, and also a voice to represent themselves. As women, they are forced to accept the risky working condition since the Dutch colonization until today.

B. Communication organization and the identity of tea-picker women

In historical records, when General Mashudi served as the Governor of West Java, at the end of handover the sovereignty of the Dutch period around 1960-1970, there were 373 plantations in West Java with an area of 699.248 ha submitted to the Indonesian Government. Since that time until today, the Dutch plantation management style is still maintained, both in terms of managerial and processing tea techniques. The slow pace of innovation may be caused by the conditions of the colonial cultural organizations. How the manager order and speak to the worker, and how the worker act to respect their supervisor are still in colonial times. The pattern of "kawula-gusti" have never been forgotten in this community. This is what the researcher labeled as colonial mechanism. Based on a field trip in Subang and Ciwidey, even the machines used for processing tea are Dutch heritage. Here we can conclude that the plantation management keep the status quo because they are comfortable with colonial mechanism. This colonial mechanism is obvious in an organizational structure such as follow:

Figure 1. Organizational Structure of Plantation (Source: Field Study, 2014)



Based on the observations and interviews with the tea pickers, other workers and mandor as the foreman, it can be described that life on the plantation is closed. The company prefers to recruit the family member of their workers rather than somebody who applied. Their educational levels on average are dropping out from junior high school. The condition to reach higher educational level is a hard doing; it needs a lot of energy and is expensive. Not many children of tea picker women who succeeded to continue their educations to a better level. The company never gives them education allowance. This is due to the remoteness of the plantation area. It is because the plantation provides jobs for those with low educational levels. If any employees continue their education to a higher level, the management of plantation does not provide proper position and status or adjustment to the educational level with the structure of job.

In fact the plantation provides educational facilities only up to primary school level. In some sections, there are health and sports facilities. But these facilities are provided by the district government. To achieve higher education the students have to travel 5-10 km by foot every day. The remote locations need strong efforts. Besides the distance, the education cost is two times higher than their mothers' wages. This condition has caused lack of motivation to reach higher education among plantation workers and their families. They never think about the importance of education. Their simple idea is: to work in the plantation; they do not need higher education, as long as they can read and do simple calculations. The position and honor can be easily obtained if they have a position in the plantation, not by gaining high school certificates. That is enough for them. Thus, their life seems to have been constructed to remain below, subjugated and weakened. They do not have any desire to go forward and develop their life better as a human being.

In line with these conditions, it appears that the colonial ideology teaches the workers to accept and be the subject to exploitation and teaches managers also administrators to practice the art of governing on behalf of the dominant class. Previous research also found that awareness of the imperialism on the way we think raises an attempt to restore a way of thinking that then produces a discourse or postcolonial studies [4]. The consciousness awakened with the realization that the culture has existed since their ancestors; their personal ideologies are formed in such a way because of the power over society of the plantation workers. According to Habermas, communicative action reproduces the living world and to ensure the continuity of cultural traditions and knowledge necessary coherence in everyday life.

C. Daily speech

Based on research, in their daily life tea picker women have hard lives. Every day, they have to spend 8 -10 hours at field. Under the rain or in dry season they must work. They pick tea bare hand and put them in a long cloth and cover the leaves until the weighting time. More or less they pick 25 kilos a day. They sing and try to be happy along the working hour. But they never speak to strangers. They know several words like "afdeling", "pabrik", "waker" and "sinder", but they do not realize it was Dutch. They know the words since they are young. They remember the words as part of theirs.

Another example is the housing position; the information board, the notice board and the factory area are in Dutch. The most important is the "Administratur" house (a house for the ruler of plantation). It is sacred for them. Not every worker can visit the factory and "the big house" (this is what they usually called the house). If they come to the big house or factory, they must remove their footwear or sandals. This action is a kind of action when they enter the holy place such as mosque or the feudal ruler's house. Local people in a plantation can enter the big house area if they work there as "bedinde", "kacung" or "jongos". Bedinde is servant woman or maid. Kacung and Jongos usually refer to male that work as servant. In several cases, bedinde also acts as sexual pleasure for the Meneer (the ruler of plantation).

All these Dutch term indicate unbalanced communications. The position of the local people is lower than the white people. There is a binary position in this communication. As a marginal group, women have become the subject of this research. Considering many years they have spent working in the plantation, it means many communications that they have done with the colonial mechanism in the work place. Therefore, the identity of the individual is the effect of the structure of the ideological discourse that constructs the subject positions or places that become the foundation for the subjects to understand the world. Therefore, a process of internalization in the subject happens when the plantation ideologies possesses their minds and redefining the way of thinking as well as the future of plantation workers.

The results showed the existence of certain conditions that perpetuate colonial mechanism in the life of tea picker women as one study of organizational communication. To summarize, the colonial mechanism in organizational communication has changed the experience of tea picker women. As mentioned before, tea picker women suffered double burden. This colonial mechanism put women in the lowest level of plantation organizational structure. These women have never had a chance to be promoted, to grab the higher rank positions and to live as their dream.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the conclusion, the researcher finds that colonial mechanism is constructed through corporate culture especially in daily conversation and company norms. These norms have built a new identity as the plantations norms. Second, the researcher finds that colonial mechanism is constructed from daily speech. The Dutch language has been absorbed into the local language.

Historically, oppression on tea picker women's life has been inherited since the Dutch colonial era. This research reveals that women have never had a chance to pursue their choices. Their life is in the tea plantation, working and raising their family. It is recommended that future research could help tea picker women to be more dependent to see and choose the best for them.

References

- [1] G. Spivak, *Can Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow-Sacrifice*, University of Illinois Press, 1985.
- [2] C.T. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship & Colonial Discourse. *Third World Women & The Politics of Feminism*", Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, pp.51-80.
- [3] L. Gandhi, *Teori Pascakolonial, Upaya meruntuhkan Hegemoni Barat*, Qalam. Jakarta, 1998.
- [4] A. Loomba, *Colonialism Postcolonialism* second edition. Routledge, London New York, 1998.
- [5] R. Guha, *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asia History*, Oxford University Press. India, 1982.
- [6] B. Homi, *The Location of Culture*, New York. Routledge, 1994.
- [7] L.A. Odeh, "Postcolonial Feminism and The Veil: Thinking the Different", *Feminist Review*, No. 43, 1993, pp.26-37.
- [8] S. Newell, "Postcolonial Masculinities and the Politics of Visibility", *Journal Postcolonial Writing*, 45:3, 2009. pp. 243-250.
- [9] Y.Y. Kim, "Ideology, Identity, Intercultural Communication: an Analysis of Differing Academic Conceptions of Cultural Identity", *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2007, pp. 237-253.
- [10] N. Shahani, 'I have a Voice': Speech, Silence and the rehabilitation of Empire, *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 18, No.1, 2015, pp. 67-84.
- [11] W. Pace, & D. Faules, "Komunikasi Organisasi: strategi meningkatkan kinerja perusahaan". Remaja Rosdakarya. Bandung, 2002.
- [12] S. Robbins, "Organizational Behavior" 10th Edition. Pearson Education Inc., 2003.
- [13] A. Liliweri, *Gatra-gatra Komunikasi Antarbudaya*. Pustaka Pelajar. Yogyakarta, 2001.
- [14] E. Said, "Culture and Imperialism". New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1993.
- [15] S. Littlejohn, and Foss, "Encyclopedia of Communication", 9th Edition. Thomson Wadsworth. Belmont. California., 2008, pp. 46 & 56
- [16] S. Littlejohn, and Foss. "Theories of Communication", Theory. Sage Publication. Washington, 2009, Pp. 209.
- [17] Cresswell, John. 2013. "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five approaches" 3rd Edition. Sage Publication Inc. LA, London, New Delhi, Singapore.