

# Cultural Reproduction of Merti Kali Code Art in Brontokusuman, Yogyakarta City, Indonesia

Shubuha Pilar Naredia<sup>1</sup>, Yuyun Sunesti<sup>2</sup>, Siti Zunariyah<sup>3</sup>, Akhmad Ramdhon<sup>4</sup>,  
Argyo Demartoto<sup>5</sup>, Raheqli Humsona<sup>6</sup> & Trisni Utami<sup>7</sup>

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,  
Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta Central Java 57126, Indonesia  
Email : shubuhapilar@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, yuyun\_sunesti@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>2</sup>,  
zunariyah@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>3</sup>, aramdhon@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>4</sup>,  
argyodemartoto\_fisip@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>5</sup>, raheqli64@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>6</sup>,  
trisniutami@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>7</sup>

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## Abstract

Merti Kali Code traditional art based-movement around the Code River in Brontokusuman area of Yogyakarta is a cultural product as well as an inspiration to preserve the river clean and beneficial to the surrounding area. In fact, it acknowledges the importance and value of water for human life. However, within this practice, there are also intriguing political and social facets. An examination of cultural reproduction practiced there, helps in understanding the art arena as a struggle between agents for position and legitimacy, each varying in capital accumulation and habitus. This study examines these complexities.

The study employed an exploratory qualitative technique using a single case study to critically examine the actors behind the Merti Kali Code art. These included the Government of Kelurahan Brontokusuman, Dewa Bronto Tourism-Conscious Group artists, visitors, and supporting community. It employed observation, in-depth interview, and documentation as techniques of collecting data

It reveals that Merti Kali Code art is being reproduced culturally in Brontokusuman to promote the village identity as Dewa Bronto Tourist Village. Merti Tumpeng Robyong, Kirab Budaya, and Kenduri Agung art forms all exhibit cultural reproduction. Cultural reproduction manifests itself through art alteration and evolution as part of cultural attraction presentation. Kelurahan Brontokusuman government, Dewa Bronto tourism-conscious organization, artists, visitors, and citizens all participate in the cultural reproduction of Merti Kali Code art in Brontokusuman as actors. Habitus provides players with symbolic, cultural knowledge of potential as well as social, and economic capital.

**Keywords:** Cultural reproduction; Art; Merti kali code; Brontokusuman; Yogyakarta

## Introduction

Indonesian society as largely isolated in the global arena, has long been vulnerable to global invasions at the local level. Since the Dutch colonial era, it has seen globalization through trade relationships (de Zwart, 2021). However, there is still a sense that not everyone can just accept the global invasion, and efforts to limit it persist due to concerns about the impacts on local communities, such as identity deterioration, changes in values, or environmental damage (Arnett, 2002). In this view, it is indispensable to determine what ideal and practical strategies the Indonesian people may use to navigate the global environment and its diverse impacts at the level of ideas, behavior, and material cultural production (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). Similarly, traditional art is being neglected and replaced with more popular foreign art as capitalist culture develops. Besides, the room for artists to express themselves has become fewer. This has led to the creation of a group movement of artists who reproduce certain traditional arts.

Merti Kali Code traditional art based-movement around the Code River in Brontokusuman area of Yogyakarta is a cultural product as well as an inspiration to preserve the river clean and beneficial to the surrounding area. In addition, it also acknowledges the importance and value of water for human life.

One of the cultural products that can serve as an inspiration for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (subsequently abbreviated SDGs) are national and international commitments aimed at promoting the welfare of people worldwide. The SDGs, which comprise 17 global goals and targets by 2030, were approved by developed as well as developing countries during the UN General Assembly in September 2015 (Montiel *et al.*, 2021). SDGs implementation has become inseparable from the guiding principles of being integrative, inclusive, and leaving neither anyone nor anything (Dewi *et al.*, 2018), envisioned to implement sustainable development through utilizing the potentials existing and owned by everyone in an integrated way through building and developing more open environments accessible to everyone. Therefore, in its implementation, transparency is required from all parties to be aware of the importance of integration as the basis of Sustainable Development (SD) implementation.

The most important of potentials that can be grown and developed in SD are traditions, including art (Leonandri and Rosmadi, 2018). Due to such conditions, many art producers have made art one of their capitals in an effort to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. Acceleration becomes important in meeting the SDGs. Similarly, the growth and development of diverse arts is influenced by a wide range of factors, one of which is cultural reproduction. Using the cultural reproduction framework, the presence of artwork will be sustained better as it is encouraged by numerous supporting habitus and capitals (Azubuike, Moore and Vaidya, 2023).

This study is based on Bourdieu's concept of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu maintains that cultural reproduction is tied to four concepts: arena, capital, habitus, and trajectory. Apart from that, the interrelation of these four concepts influences the existence of objects or works, which in Bourdieu's language are referred to as 'works of art'. The existence of an object exists if knowledge about the object is distributed through the role of agents in the realm or arena who contribute to producing the values of that knowledge (Bourdieu, 1993).

This paper presents the Merti Kali Code traditional art-based movement around the Code River in the Brontokusuman district of Yogyakarta, based on the concept of Bourdieu. It examines the interrelation patterns preserving traditional art, allowing cultural reproduction to continue constantly.

The primary aim for establishing the Merti Kali art movement is to protect the river ecology and the overall ecological health. It is rooted in community knowledge and customs, with an emphasis on awareness and care for the river ecosystem (Hadiputro, Handayani and Syahbana, 2021). People living in the Brontokusuman area have preserved the Merti Kali Code art for many years, making it an interesting object owing to its impeccable preservation. To analyze research data, the concept of Cultural Reproduction is applied, which refers to the act of re-presenting the original culture in a new environment and form (Claramonte, 2014).

To ensure the survival of a pre-existing cultural product, it is presented in the shape of a new work which fulfills modern demands and conditions. In addition, cultural reproduction is the process of recreating or reintroducing a certain culture, including the values and resources that people use in their daily lives (Edensor, 2020). Merti Kali Code Art in Brontokusuman is important to study as it can be used to describe the profile of the local community's potential resources for achieving the SDGs.

## Review of Literature

Merti Kali Code activities have been extensively studied but are still limited to ecological preservation (Saptutyingsih *et al.*, 2023) and economic concerns to residents living around the Kali Code and government policy with regard to the river ecosystem (Jati, 2013). Merti Kali River conservation based on local wisdom highlight the local community efforts to role-play by those engaged in the Merti Kali event. It confirms that the event did not lead to river pollution (Hadiputro, Handayani and Syahbana, 2021). Jati (2013) examines the implementation of the Prokasih policy in Yogyakarta City and has found that the failure to implement the Prokasih policy occurred since the government was regularly inconsistent in managing the river ecosystems.

Saptutyingsih *et al.* (2023) examine the potential of optimizing the river through Merti Kali program to support a sustainable community involving residents on the banks of the Kauman Babadan River. They conclude that there is a better understanding of the importance of Merti Kali and the Mechanical bar screen technology. Seftyono (2010) also examine the ecosystem from the perspective of local communities using traditional ecological knowledge to show that the ecosystems border the daily lives of the Kampung Code residents. Accordingly, the meaning of ecosystem values can range from the ecological values to the social ones that implicitly result from people's relationships with the related ecosystems.

Several studies on cultural reproduction have been undertaken on local culture. For example, using Pierre Bourdieu's theory, Nukha (2017) links the relationship between habitus and social practices, including cultural reproduction and actors participating in traditional arts performances at Balai Soedjatmoko. Hakim *et al.* (2023) highlight the cultural practices of Plunturan Ponorogo Village and identify the arena of cultural production in the process of transforming the village apparatus system. This arena comprises elders and audiences who act as the community guardians of cultural values.

Zurmailis and Faruk (2018) study the Doxa generated by the Jakarta Arts Council (DKJ) and its role as an institution exercising legitimacy to build cultural construction. They use Bourdieu's genetic structuralism as constructivist structuralism, the habitus and perspective put on the Jakarta Arts Council, which doxa and standards for cultural acts have established through symbolic violence against the participating agents. Above-mentioned studies have not examined the art issues associated with cultural reproduction from a cultural studies perspective, particularly on the possibilities for the existing cultural reproduction exercised in the Merti Kali Code art by the community living in the Brontokusuman area of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This is important as this study highlights the cultural reproduction to Merti Kali Code art practiced by community living in Brontokusuman of Yogyakarta, cultural participants concerning the culture they aspire to, the environment they influence, the legitimacy they create through manifestos and cultural statements, as well as communication media built through habitus and cultural practices in ceremonies featuring Merti Kali Code art.

## Research Methods

This study employs an exploratory qualitative method with a single case study approach. This study is based on Bourdieu's concept of cultural reproduction, which is tied to four concepts: arena, capital, habitus, and trajectory (Bourdieu, 1993). Merti Kali Code traditional art-based movement around the Code River in the Brontokusuman are explained based on the interrelation patterns preserving the traditional art, allowing cultural reproduction to continue constantly. Informants of this study were selected using purposive technique, including actors of Merti Kali Code art, Government of Kelurahan Brontokusuman, Dewa Bronto Tourism-

Conscious Group (Indonesia: Kelompok Sadar Wisata Dewa Bronto or Pokdarwis Dewa Bronto), artists, tourists and the supporting people as the secondary data. Techniques of collecting data used were observation, in-depth interview, and documentation. Data was validated using source and method triangulations, and then analyzed using an interactive model of analysis (Swedberg, 2020).

## Findings

Merti Kali Code Art in Brontokusuman is a social tradition that prevails in Kelurahan Brontokusuman, Mergangsan Sub District, Yogyakarta City. As a Kampung (urban village), Brontokusuman is known to be a modest village located in the south side of Yogyakarta City. This Kampung is considered to have originally served as a residence for those with limited opportunities including homeless people, beggars, and pickpockets. The Yogyakarta City government subsequently established a human development program aimed at overcoming the stigma. The initiative is seen as a significant strategy to develop more productive generations in the Brontokusuman area. Based on the people's collective memory, this Kampung was once known as Kampung Preman (a thugs' village) in Yogyakarta. In terms of its growth and development, Brontokusuman played a significant part in Indonesian struggle history throughout the colonial period. According to historical records, Brontokusuman was the base of a warrior group known as *Hantu Maut* (Death Ghost). This group was admired for its outstanding bravery as a militant warrior group during the struggle to create the Republic of Indonesia (Pratama, 2023) and the Struggle Museum in Brontokusuman confirms this.

Brontokusuman begins to expand in parallel with its people's mobility as modernity accelerates. Since 2013, Brontokusuman has promoted itself as Dewa Bronto Tourist Village. Tourist village is an environment management method establishing community or people as the focus or major actor of tourism development through all the potentials it has in a settlement establishing and then exploiting them for the people's welfare (Herman *et al.*, 2023). Dewa Bronto Tourist Village operates on the basis of social ecotourism and is located on the south bank of the Kali Code Rivershed, with handicraft and traditional art attractions featured in all activities. The social ecotourism strategy seems to have been adopted as it emphasizes on the growth of nature-based tourism on sustaining ecological protection through educating and interpreting the natural environment. As a tourist village, Dewa Bronto offers various attractions to visitors: river tracing and outbound. The attractions are also supported with Brontokusuman-typical culinary product, *sate telo*, which is a *satai*-like food made of sweet potatoes. Dewa Bronto develops craft potentials for the souvenir manufacturing industry, such as *blankon* craft and diverse handicrafts made of recycled materials.

Dewa Bronto Tourist Village in Yogyakarta performs river ecological conservation management, showing the importance of encouraging the development of clean river programs in urban areas while maintaining the ecology of the region (Jati, 2013). Considering the definition, local government, with its varying accommodating and sustainable strategies, contributes toward preserving the conservation program for collective welfare, especially through the community-based approach used for people empowerment (Febriani *et al.*, 2024). Actors involved in Dewa Bronto Tourist Village manage ecological conservation through the use of varying habitus and capital in real-life implementation. Bourdieu (1993) proposes that actors with varied habitus and (symbolic, cultural, economic, and social) capitals would compete for each other's place in a practical arena (Azubuike, Moore and Vaidya, 2023). In order to fight for their position, actors will engage in cultural reproduction to establish habitus and capital in a practice.

Merti Kali Code art in Brontokusuman, as an arena of cultural reproduction, is a sort of local wisdom that should be maintained and preserved by the people. These many artworks are frequently reproduced in other art shows, of course, to maintain the life of Dewa Bronto Tourist Village. For example, Merti Tumpeng Robyong traditional art includes such attractions as Raja Melawan Arus (The King goes against the stream), Kirab Budaya (Cultural Carnival), and Kenduri Agung (Great Feast) in its procession.



Fig.1: Merti Kali Code Brontokusuman Procession

Source: Author

Merti Tumpeng Kali Code Rivershed features the Robyong art exhibition themed Raja Melawan Arus (The King goes against the stream). The king's part in the performance is frequently played by the Head of Brontokusuman Village (Lurah Brontokusuman) carried along the banks of the Code River on a stretcher by his bodyguards. At the end of the river tracing activity, the King advised his people to maintain the Code River banks clean and tidy before sowing fish seeds with the aim of growing the fish and consuming them later. This reflects the importance of the tradition. It indicates that art, as self-expression and emotion of people who produce it, provides more guidance than just a common art show (Naredia, 2023). Meanwhile, the name Tumpeng Robyong was chosen as it is a kind of Nasi Tumpeng (a meal consisting of numerous side dishes and yellow rice) from Java with unique dressings such as egg, chilies, shallot, and shrimp paste placed on top. The bottom of the tumpeng is filled with a variety of side dishes, vegetables, and other items. This arrangement evidently has a function beyond from being a sign of mutual gratitude, to encourage people to be more harmonious and preserve integration as a single unit, as well as follow and submit to the leaders they have chosen collectively. It means that, on the one hand, leaders represent the people's interests, and on the other side, people should continuously support leaders in carrying out their leadership duties properly the concept of "going against the stream" proves just as appealing. In this sense, the Code River stream is analogous to the recent wave of modernity that has floated across urban areas, particularly among the Brontokusuman people. Consequently, cultural reproduction emphasizes that a King (a leader) should courageously go against the current of modernity for the sake of his people's welfare, despite the rapid speed.

Meanwhile, traditional art attractions such as dance and *jathilan*, as well as other varying exhibitions of creative works presented by Brontokusuman people, are more popular in the Kirab Budaya and Kenduri Agung traditions. Cultural Carnival is important because it confirms the identity of Dewa Bronto tourist village. The identity is then functioned as a medium of communicating between communities to show their existence (Pradana, 2021). Furthermore, in relation to Kenduri Agung, *kenduri* is a community activity also called *selamatan*. This is a customary rite commonly held by Javanese community. This *kenduri* rite is usually held to celebrate various events: birth, marriage, funeral, and religious events. Through involving social ecosystem in performing art in the context of tourist village, the local community (people) can keep maintaining the values inherent to the tradition (Seftyono, 2010). Kenduri Agung is a traditional ritual ceremony performed annually on the banks of the Code River in Brontokusuman involving all participants and visitors. All festival attendees seated cross-legged on mats near Kenduri-typical meals that featured savory/yellow rice, fried chicken, prepared vegetables, and others provided by the village's custom administration. After praying led by the local religious leader, the meals were distributed to all participants of *kenduri* and eaten together on the spot, regardless their grade and degree. In this event, some entertainments were performed: Jathilan Anak, Jaranan Anak Dance, and Golek Classical Dance.

The actors of cultural reproduction in the Merti Kali Code art in Brontokusuman consist of Kelurahan Brontokusuman government, Dewa Bronto Tourism-Conscious Group, and people. The actors have varying habitus. As the State's representative, the Government of Kelurahan Brontokusuman administers through establishing regulations and policies for its people's welfare. The numerous rules have been pushed in different media to educate people on how to preserve their village's character as a tourist village. Numerous effects and assistance are supplied for the benefit of the Brontokusuman people. As the leader of people, the Government of Kelurahan Brontokusuman provides an integrated (*nyawiji*) service, which means combining with the people while still respecting and complying with the rules of the Central Government. The *nyawiji* process is manifested from the use of (*Krama Inggil*) Javanese language combined with Indonesian language at any event among the people.

Meanwhile, the actors (Dewa Bronto Tourism-conscious group and Brontokusuman community) hold similar habitus as Dewa Bronto Tourism-conscious group members are Brontokusuman people. Being mindful of their position as a tourism village, both become acclimated to the presence of strangers in their surroundings. Tolerance, mutual cooperation, and decorum attitudes is getting more inherent to their role as the implementer of Dewa Bronto Tourist Village. The tolerance, mutual cooperation, and decorum attitudes are not present suddenly. Armed with experience as the group ever marginalized, Brontokusuman people now show those attitudes as the form of social integration. Meanwhile, other actors consisting artists practice continuously to perform the artistic attraction optimally in each of events. The artists begin to involve children as the regenerating attempt to keep the art containing those values existing and preserved despite the exposure to tourism industry. Introducing arts to young generation (children) is important as the positive canalization if the children begin to want to realize their expression. The children should be equipped with other skills to live in the swift modernity stream (Prihadi, Rohidi and Retnowati, 2019).

Another actor includes both domestic and foreign visitors interested in visiting Dewa Bronto Tourist Village in order to maintain the artistic event alive, which does not exist in their region. The most popular social media activity are selfies and various kinds of filming. Tourists might openly enjoy the art by laughing, pondering, and reading testimonials in various media outlets. Tourists regard art reproduction as a content, appreciate it, and strive to share it for self-existence reasons, creating a similar picture from ethnic situations and celebrating it in an innovative way (Sang, 2020). In this context, the commodity with commodification objectives is a habitus structure, prompting actors to prepare and show any product for tourism purposes.

The capital of cultural reproduction in Merti Kali Code art in Brontokusuman is divided into symbolic, cultural, social, and economic capitals, which all belonged to the actors. Symbolic capital as the tourist village obviously encourages actors such as Kelurahan Brontokusuman Government, Dewa Bronto Tourism-Conscious Group, and Brontokusuman people to engage in cultural reproduction more readily due to common tourism interests and people's welfare goal. Another key symbolic capital is Brontokusuman village's location in the Kali Code Rivershed, which distinguishes it from other urban villages. People living in the riparian area can use it for various purposes instead of being concerned about catastrophes. In this instance, the notion of "riparian" refers to the river edge (Rachmawati *et al.*, 2018). This strategy might help to transform a catastrophe orientation into territorial resilience, allowing for optimal development through implementing possibilities (Saptutyingsih *et al.*, 2023). Meanwhile, to tourist and artist actors' symbolic capital is known as the ones enthusiastic with artistic event. Tourists serve as the financial income goal, while artists serve to support tradition in Brontokusuman tourist village. Both of them putatively can help promote Dewa Bronto Tourist Village.

Cultural capital refers to the knowledge of local potentials that players' knowledge (the government of Kelurahan Brontokusuman, the Dewa Bronto tourism-conscious group, and the people) should retain, expand, and develop in order to accomplish sustainable development goals. Potentials such as the village's territorial ecology and lengthy history become their cultural capital to convert the region into a Tourist Village and then make Merti Kali art that defines the identity of Brontokusuman. Other actors, such as artists and tourists, contribute to

cultural capital by recognizing Brontokusuman as a potential tourist destination or news source as it shows a wide variety of regionally unique traditional arts and is supported by story encasing that promotes values across all activities (Bourdieu, 1993; Azubuike, Moore and Vaidya, 2023). Cultural capital can be reinforced by the actors' capacity to promote one another (artists and tourists), as this enables the actors to produce more cultural reproduction through narratives in other arenas. In this situation, tourists and artists are fostered and changed to increase cultural capital and increase their potential use (Saragi, 2022). In other words, understanding education as cultural capital can begin to be replicated even though it is located on the river bank, and value development emerges as a result of community awareness of the presence of residential areas on the river bank that strive for sustainable development for their citizens through the tourism scheme (Sulistiyani *et al.*, 2021).

In the Merti Kali Code tradition of Brontokusuman, social capital is equally important in art reproduction. All actors in supporting art reproduction in Brontokusuan Tourist Village can be linked to one other through social networks and communication skills. Social capital is represented by social networks such as tourism forums, government, tour and travel agents, catering, security, and personal. Although the actors initially connected to tourism purposes, it is critical to the River Restoration Movement's network transformation (Zunariyah, Suharko and Suharman, 2023). The well-maintained social capital between actors certainly affected by cultural capital in the form of knowledge. The lack of knowledge on each other will be a distinctive challenge in utilizing social capital in cultural reproduction. In this stage, symbolic capital serves only as reinforcer or additional cosmetics for the strong cultural capital.

Economic capital is closely related to financial material. In this case, it includes funding. Each of actors has varying economic capital including grant fund, sponsorship, income of creative industry, and fee as the performer. All of these enable them to be present in the Cultural Reproduction arena of Merti Kali Code art in Brontokusuman. In addition to funding, economic capital can be the facilities the actors have to support their activities as the actors of Cultural Reproduction of Merti Kali Code art in Brontokusuman. Even economic capital is also often inherent to the arena, for example, road access and public facilities.

## Conclusion

Cultural Reproduction of Merti Kali Code Art in Brontokusuman is carried out to support the identity as Dewa Bronto Tourist Village. Cultural reproduction occurs in Merti Tumpeng Rombyong, Kirab Budaya (Cultural Carnival), and Kenduri Agung arts. Cultural reproduction is manifested into art transformation and development as the part of cultural attraction presentation. The actors involved in the Cultural Reproduction of Merti Kali Code Art in Brontokusuman consists of Kelurahan Brontokusuman Government, Dewa Bronto Tourism-Conscious Group, artists, tourists, and people. Such habitus as nyawiji (integration), tolerance, mutual cooperation, decorum, art regeneration, and commodification give the actors some capitals, including symbolic, cultural, social, and economic capitals. Symbolic capital includes an identity as Tourist Village, Cultural capital involves knowledge on potential local wisdom, Social Capital includes social network and communicating ability, and Economic Capital includes funding, public facility and accessibility.

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