



Conformity of Javanese Cultural Values in Early Marriage : Case Study of Farmer Family Communication

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v6i2.538>

Abstract

This study aims to describe the conformity of Javanese cultural values in farmer families in Tegaldowo Village, Gunem Subdistrict, Rembang Regency in choosing partners for daughters who first married at an early age by using Family Communication Pattern Theory by Koerner and Fitzpatrick. The research approach uses descriptive qualitative with the case study method through in-depth interviews with 9 families consisting of nucleus and extended family. The results of the study show high conformity to the values of Javanese culture and kinship system. The decision to choose a partner and conduct a marriage is based on the collectivity of group values rather than personal wants and needs.

Keywords: Communication; Conformity; Early Marriage; Javanese Cultural Values

Introduction

Ideal family communication is characterized by warm, spontaneous and open conversations discussing various topics without any pressure (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Based on research by Xia, Xie, Zhou et al. (2004) decision making in the family that involves active communication with children regarding family issues is positively related to the attachment of the relationship between the two and causes minimal conflict. One important decision for a child's life is the marriage decision, with whom and when to marry. In the case of early marriage in Indonesia, the Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF (2017: 7) released data on early marriage by 23%, of which one in five women ever married at age 20-24 years, had their first marriage before 18 years, with more prevalence of marriage in rural areas (27.11%), compared to urban areas (17.09%). Other research shows that marriage occurs not only from the self and the child's readiness to get married, but also because of the attitude of parents who tend to support children's desires and even be forced (Rafiah: 2009). Compliance and adherence to the actions of parents shows high conformity so that each family member has the same actions, values and beliefs and focuses on harmony and avoidance of conflict.

Conformity and culture is an inseparable unity. Culture shapes life patterns and guides how humans think, feel and communicate. Cultural communication behavior in the family is strongly influenced by the family system: family structure, marriage system and marriage customs that distinguishes the position of father and mother, the role of sons and daughters and the role of extended

families (Liliweri, 2011: 187). In early marriage, conformity to cultural values is an important factor in the ongoing practice of traditional marriage. This study took place in Tegaldowo Village, Gunem District, Rembang Regency, on farmer families, which was based on the high number of marriages in 2014-2017, in 56 cases where 11 daughters had been married for the second or third time and were widows aged 15-20 years with a marriage distance of only 1-2 years (KUA Gunem District, 2017). To describe how is the conformity and which Javanese Culture values are believed to make early marriage practice still exists, the research theory uses is the Family Communication Patterns Theory by Koerner and Fitzpatrick with a qualitative descriptive approach with case study method.

Methodology

The study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to describe situations and events and aims to describe various conditions, situations or phenomons of decision-making in choosing a partner in a traditional farmer's family which are the object of research and describe it as a characteristic, character, model or the description of conditions, situations, or phenomenons of partner selection in early marriage. For this reason, case study methodology is used while the technique for collecting data are in-depth interviews and documentation. The data analysis technique uses data analysis from Miles & Huberman (1992), namely data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification and data validity test using source triangulation technique.

Literture Review

Conformity

According to Koerner and Fitzpatrick in the article *Toward a Theory of Family Communication* (2002: 85-86), orientation of conformity is an attempt to equalize and unify actions, values and beliefs or trusts in family communication. Conformity upholds the values of unity and togetherness so that the situation in the family is more conducive and children are more obedient. A family with a strong conformity orientation is formed by interactions that emphasize the uniformity of beliefs and actions, focus on harmony, avoid conflict and give less importance to the freedom of family members in their opinions. Communication reflects obedience to parents or other adults. Family structures are categorized traditional and have hierarchies. The family emphasizes family members to prioritize family interests rather than personal interests. It is parents who regulate control over decision making for the family, and expect children to act according to their expectations or desires (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002: 38). According to Koerner & Schrod (2014), orientation of conformity refers to situations in which two individuals or more focus on objects in their social environment that lead to two types of cognition, namely people's perceptions and beliefs about objects. Both of these cognitions will determine attributes of conformity: agreement, accuracy and suitability, where (1) agreement refers to the similarity between two people's evaluations of the object, (2) accuracy refers to the similarity of perceptions and (3) conformity refers to the similarities between beliefs and perceptions other people. These three attributes can be used to define shared social reality, namely an agreement to approve the choice of partners.

Cultural Values

Orientation of conformity refers to the situation of two or more individuals who focus on objects in their social environment that lead to two types of cognition, namely people's perceptions and beliefs about objects. Some of the factors that influence perception are age, cognitive ability, self and culture (Wood, 2013: 80-83). This study focuses on cultural discussion as a factor that forms conformity in family communication. Culture is an overall value, norm, belief, understanding and way of

communicating and interpretation of experience (Wood, 2013; DeVito 2001). Because family is the main identity in a collective culture, parents are given greater respect and attention (Wood, 2013: 81). The research of Bond & Smith (1996: 113-114) shows that countries with societies that uphold the values of collectivity tend to show higher levels of conformity than countries with individualist values. According to Liliweri (2011: 11) in a collective culture, loyalty is shown by an individual to a group including the nuclear family and extended family.

Result

Society and culture's characteristics in forming conformity

Rembang Regency is part of Java Island which is more than 1,200 km long and 500 km wide with old geological formations in the form of mountain ranges that connect both in the form of volcanic mountains and limestone hills like in the southern part of the northern coast of Rembang Regency. Based on local sources, the Historical Book of Prehistory to Independence Rembang Regency, which quotes from *Asal-Usul Wong Jawa lan Wong Kanung* explained that the oldest government in Rembang was Kedatuan (from the word *datu*/male *prabu* and *dattu*/female queen) Pucangsula which is located on the western slope of Mount Argasoka, about 2 km northeast of the city of Lasem now. The rows of limestone hills extending around the north coast also cover the North Kendeng Mountains along Lasem, Pancur, Bulu and Gunem Subdistricts including Tegaldowo itself. Based on its geographical location in the Cretaceous Mountains or Hills, there is a belief that the origin of the indigenous people of Rembang Regency is a Tibetan migrant known as *Kanung* which is interpreted as people who migrate and inhabit mountainous regions.

Identity similarity in the form of residence in a mountainous area far from the city center and limited access to knowledge and information forms a person into certain groups which causes them to have their own cultural systems including beliefs, values, attitudes and social relations that tend to be rigid and known as *Samin*. *Samin* embryos are located around the Blora region which then spreads, affects and migrates culturally including in the Rembang Regency so that the Rembang community especially in the North Kendeng mountains including Tegaldowo, is gradually known as *Samin*. The *Samin* community itself has distinctive characteristics regarding things that are held firmly as values and beliefs of the people. The authenticity of Javanese culture based on this explanation implies that the *Samin* people as the forerunner of the indigenous community of Tegaldowo Village believe in the origin of creation. The existence of the Creator or the Supreme Being is the cause of all life, the world and the universe. The community also believes that human beings are part of the nature that influences each other. To achieve the ideals of prosperous life, humans must make progress in their minds and knowledge. So the concept of collective Javanese society that is mutually respectful, and always harmonizes peacefully is born.

One of the teachings of values and beliefs in the culture of Tegaldowo Village as mentioned above is respect for parents which become a philosophy and outlook on life that underlies every decision in everyday life. The principle of respect states that every person in speech and disposition must always show respect for others according to their degree and position, the higher the social position of a person, the older in the designation and respect obtained. Koentjaraningrat (1994: 115) states that consequences will arise in the form of attitudes set aside by relatives, friends and the community in the surrounding environment if the children or community groups who are younger are not obeying or respecting the parents' wills.

Society's Cultural Values

First, Never Refuse Married Request or Proposal. Marriage that is common in girls in Tegaldowo Village at the age of 14-17 years has become a kind of culture that is done collectively by almost the majority of those who have graduated from elementary/middle school. According to Sloan

(2006), conformity is formed by several aspects, namely compactness, agreement and obedience. In general, villagers assume a harmonious and compact attitude towards the group where a person belongs is very important. Compactness is the motivation of the family to want to be recognized and become a part or member of the community group where they live. Being part of the group is affiliated as an effort to maintain group solidarity as well as a step to remain united, develop and strengthen a sense of social identity for them (Koentjaraningrat, 1994: 254-255). Understanding of villagers that tend to be communal, makes the priority of individuals to be united with their communal. A strong collective culture, formed by the intensity of meetings with neighbors and the community. So that it creates a sense of shame if one is not the same with their environment. The agreement is defined as the opinion of the reference group that has strong pressure so that children must be loyal and adjust their opinions to the opinions of the group. One form of agreement between children and family and community groups is the obligation to accept and approve the opinion of the extended family and the surrounding community in order to accept the decision to accept requests and proposals made by men. Both the nucleus and extended family teach the principle of abstinence from refusing male applications even though daughters don't like it. They also emphasized that it would be fine if they finally separated (divorced), provided that they did not reject the wishes of the men.

Regarding the relations between humans, farm families in Tegaldowo tend to be collaterally oriented where there is an assumption that someone is not alone and is always dependent and expects help from others or relatives. So it is obligatory to maintain good relations, put themselves in their situation and apply uniformly (conform) to each other, even though sometimes not in line. Conformism towards the collectivity of the community groups in which they live is shown by the attitude of agreeing and implementing the same values and habits in marriage decisions, which is when a daughter who has been asked or wanted by a man has no choice but to accept. It becomes a very embarrassing thing if the family refuses, which means the family denies the habits that apply to the community environment. Rejection of the wishes or proposals of men is avoided because they are considered to be contrary to the principle of group collectivity and are believed to bring *malat* (unfortunate) from the occult forces that are instilled from generation to generation by families who have extended families such as grandmothers and grandparents. Obedience is manifested in the form of a threat or punishment that children do not immediately get a mate or bewitched if they reject the request of a man who wants to marry her so that the children obey even if they do not want it.

Second, respect for parents. Based on the typology of the Javanese people are differentiated into *njeron beteng* and *njaban beteng* to distinguish the people who live in the royal environment commonly called *priyayi* and people living outside the kingdom called *wong cilik* (Endraswara, 2006: 12). *Wong cilik* have the characteristics of abusive language and village culture. Stratification of both of them fosters a certain attitude in which the *njaban beteng* community members must be *mundhuk-mundhuk* or known as a *ngajeni* attitude or respect in a certain way. As the category of *wong cilik* with village culture, rural communities are thick with the identity of their collectivity. Because family is the main identity in a collective culture, parents are given greater respect and attention. Parents in the public order are regarded as microcosms, which represent life because they were born before their children and have a superior moral position, so that they have the right to the highest honor and require filial children (Mulder, 1996: 28-29). Respect for parents as a form of high compliance is found in families where fathers are old and single parents. The choice of a partner from a father is a form of respect for parents as a way to return the favor and make the only family he has happy, even though he does not know his future husband. Respect is shown by obedience to accepting parents' choices, because children will be considered sinners if they do not respect their parents, do not listen to advice or hurt their feelings. A statement of consent to the spouse choice due to arranged marriages had to be done as a form of respect to the parents because girls do not want to be considered presumptuous or immodest (Muktiyo, 2011:54).

Third, Respect for the bond or brotherhood. Based on research from 9 families who became informants, 3 families still had kinship relations with their daughters' future husbands. For Tegaldowo's people, kinship (*batih*) is still highly valued. Getting a partner from a family is an advantage and luck that is believed to strengthen the brotherhood. Marriage is a symbol of the unification and interrelation of kinship between families which still common. No matter whether the daughters likes or dislikes the decision, parents will be happy to match her daughter with a man who still has the same blood ties without even giving an explanation. For parents, blood-related feelings create a sense of comfort because they have known each other for a long time. Some parents believe that if marriage is not done with relatives, it will cause disharmony or damage to kinship or brotherhood. Conformity to kinship relations is not only communicated by biological parents, but also extended family. They play a significant role in strengthening the message that the selection of partners from relatives is intended so that the brotherhood does not break up or disappear. Instead of daughters being married to other people who are not known well to the family, it is better to find a partner from their own family. In Javanese terms this is known as *Ben bendhone gak ilang*, or does not fall into the hands of others. Rejection of the choice of a mate who still has kinship ties is considered as a shameful thing and hurts the feelings of the men. The choice of partner from kinship element is important to continue or maintain the brotherhood, avoid hatred and hostility and avoid damaged or broken brotherhood.

Fourth, gossip and shame in community interaction. Conformity in partner and marriage choices is closely related to environmental influences. The family is part of a community group with certain values, beliefs and trusts that make it different from other community groups. Geographically, the distance between neighboring houses is coupled with the habit of people gathering, drinking coffee or just hanging out/chatting casually with neighbors and relatives. From the activities of interpersonal communication with small groups of society, it is certain that information or gossip will spread quickly and must be known by everyone. This was proven by researchers, where all the informants involved in this study knew exactly who the women were married at an early age, the location of the house to the background of their marriage. This information dissemination is the result of interpersonal communication among neighbors.

The decision to get married early is strongly influenced by the culture of shame as a result of the neighbors' talk if the marriage is not done immediately to the daughter. This shame is the collective identity of the Javanese community groups, especially Tegaldowo Village, both those who are married by their own choice or because of arrangement. The choice of partner and marriage is very dependent on the decisions of parents or other adults in the family. Parents believe that proposals submitted by men must be accepted or never refused to maintain the good name of the family while avoiding shame. Javanese behavior in social relations is strongly influenced by the values of the adopted Javanese culture, where feelings of *isin* (very embarrassed) are identified with groups of inferior people in social interaction, so parents will avoid things that make them in the inferior group, vice versa they will try to enter the superior group to obtain honor (*aji*) by marrying their daughters at a young age. Like merchandise not withered there is already a bargain. Women who are 17 years or older and have no partners will always be the objects of talk and gossip about others with stereotypical *perawan kliwatan* (old maid). For rural communities, the hope of the age of early marriage becomes a collective expectation agreed upon unwritten by community groups and becomes a lifestyle. Women must obey the collective agreement. The feeling of being afraid of rejecting a man's proposal is analogous to the stakes of reputation and family pride. Rejection is considered a symbol of resistance and undermines the self-esteem of others. So that parents will feel embarrassed or afraid to hurt others if they reject the proposal or desire of the men. This is in accordance with the Endraswara's statement (2006: 148) where one of the *seluluh* taught by parents to children to maintain the family's dignity and authority so that it is always well-maintained by not hurting or injuring others. Values such as *Sadhumuk Bathuk Senyali Bumi* for Tegaldowo's people give the principle that if self-esteem is lowered or hurt, the male family will desperately fight so that no

one dares to resist because there is still a belief in mystical or magical powers in the form of witchcraft as the consequences of refusal the desire of men to marry women at an early age in Tegaldowo Village.

Discussion

Based on the theory of Family Communication Patterns, conformity refers to the similarity of values, beliefs and attitudes of family members to family leaders or elderly people. This is indicated by being obedient to parental decisions and extended to partner choices. Because family is the main identity in a collective culture, parents are given greater respect and attention (Wood, 2013: 81). As a Javanese community, the community of Tegaldowo Village has collective cultural characteristics that place shared values in a group higher than individual values. Loyalty of girls to local cultural values is shown by the attitude of accepting the agreement of the partner choice, even if it is contrary to his personal desires, causing inconvenience and compulsion. A good decision is a decision that belongs to a group or habit. When conflicts arise, decisions or choices are prioritized based on common goals. The desire to be respected and to apply uniformly with their group, namely to marry at an early age and receive a mate chosen by parents is the reason for daughters to follow their parents' choices in order to avoid shame and gossip. Endraswara in his book *Javanese Life Philosophy* mentions one of the traditions of the Javanese community, *Ngrasani* (2006: 33), which was born out of a false cultural impulse because the Javanese do not like to express things bluntly (*blak-blakan*). So that everything is always wrapped in feelings and *ngrasani* is the right way to talk about other people clandestinely. The choice of partners from kinship elements also shows obedience and obligation in maintaining harmony in brotherly relations.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conformity to the values of Javanese culture tends to put children in an inferior position so that they cannot act according to what they want. There are unwritten rules that lead to opinions, attitudes, until the act of deciding partner choice is based on group beliefs in the form of respect for parents, respect for kinship relationships, abstinence from rejecting men's requests and worries about gossip and embarrassment received if not immediately have a partner and get married. Rejection of these values is believed to bring *malat* (*kuwalat*) which is supernatural like cannot get a mate. This shows high conformity to the values of Javanese culture and kinship system. The decision to choose a partner and conduct a marriage is based on the collectivity of the community group rather than personal wants and needs. The advice is given so that the community, especially families can be guided by balanced communication that does not only emphasize the uniformity of conformity to culture which is still occult but also gives children the opportunity to determine various choices through deep and open communication and discussion.

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