

Redefining Leadership: An Ethnographic Study of Bureaucratic Transformation in Yogyakarta's Aristocratic Society

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Abstract

Bureaucratic transformation in an environment steeped in traditional values demands an unconventional approach to leadership. This article examines how an anthropological perspective can explain the leadership transformation of a mayor who redefines his role-from authority figure to public servant-in the context of Yogyakarta's aristocracy. Using ethnographic methods, including participant observation and in-depth interviews, this study addresses three core questions: how leadership operates as a catalyst for bureaucratic transformation in an aristocratic society; what strategies are used to transform bureaucratic norms into public service; and how civil servants respond to such changes. The research findings suggest that culturally grounded leadership can play an important role in reshaping bureaucratic values and practices. The mayor's leadership broke down entrenched hierarchies, fostering a culture of service and accountability within the bureaucracy. These changes were not only administrative but also structural, contributing to more equitable and responsive governance. Ultimately, this research highlights the importance of context-rooted leadership in public sector reform, emphasizing that transformative change will be more sustainable if leadership strategies are aligned with local cultural frameworks.

Transformasi birokrasi di lingkungan yang sarat dengan nilai-nilai tradisional menuntut pendekatan kepemimpinan yang tidak konvensional. Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana perspektif antropologi dapat menjelaskan transformasi kepemimpinan seorang walikota yang mendefinisikan ulang perannya-dari figur otoritas menjadi pelayan masyarakat-dalam konteks aristokrasi Yogyakarta. Dengan menggunakan metode etnografi, termasuk observasi partisipan dan wawancara mendalam, penelitian ini menjawab tiga pertanyaan inti: bagaimana kepemimpinan beroperasi sebagai katalisator transformasi birokrasi dalam masyarakat aristokratik; strategi apa yang digunakan untuk mengubah norma-norma birokrasi menjadi pelayanan publik; dan bagaimana pegawai negeri sipil merespons perubahan tersebut. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan yang berlandaskan budaya dapat memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk kembali nilai-nilai dan praktik birokrasi. Kepemimpinan walikota mendobrak hirarki yang sudah mengakar, menumbuhkan budaya pelayanan dan akuntabilitas dalam birokrasi. Perubahan ini tidak hanya bersifat administratif tetapi juga struktural, yang berkontribusi pada tata kelola pemerintahan yang lebih adil dan responsif. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya kepemimpinan yang berakar pada konteks dalam reformasi sektor publik, dengan menekankan bahwa perubahan transformatif akan lebih berkelanjutan jika strategi kepemimpinan diselaraskan dengan kerangka kerja budaya lokal.

Keywords: aristocratic society; bureaucratic transformation; leadership; public service; work culture

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Introduction

Leadership transformation plays a crucial role in shaping governance systems and enhancing the quality of public services, especially within complex bureaucratic structures (Ekroos 2023; Holten and Brenner 2015; Swasthaisong et al. 2025). Transformational leadership has a positive impact on work behavior (Hapsari, Riyanto, and Endri 2021; Khan et al. 2020; Sudibjo and Prameswari 2021; Sun et al. 2021). Leadership is not merely about authority, but also about mediating between institutional systems and societal expectations by cultivating influence and initiating systemic change (Saif et al. 2024; Shvindina 2017).

The Ministry of Home Affairs' 2024 evaluation of regional administration performance, released in April 2025, reveals that the performance of most regional governments was low or very low. In the provincial level, only a small percentage—approximately 27% (nine out of 33 provinces)—of regional heads have demonstrated significant commitment to bureaucratic reform. However, their impacts have been substantial as they have generated innovations in service delivery and administrative performance, achieving a “high performance” rating. Notably, many of these successful reformers came from outside the bureaucratic apparatus, suggesting that transformation often emerges from actors unbound by the inertia of institutional tradition.

A prominent example is the case of Yogyakarta. Through a culturally sensitive yet disruptive leadership style, the mayor garnered over 30 awards, signaling his capacity to reorient bureaucratic attitudes and performance (Pribadi 2021; Stephan and Pathak 2016). Employing approaches such as the Citizens Charter, which encouraged a more

responsive and “smiling” bureaucracy, he challenged the longstanding aristocratic culture that once positioned bureaucrats as socially superior to the public (Merriam 1938). This case illustrates how leadership, when grounded in cultural awareness and committed to public service values, can become a strategic entry point for reform in even the most entrenched bureaucratic systems (Ambrose and Ganegoda 2020; Fauzi et al. 2021; Shah et al. 2024). It implies that, in addition to playing a positive and significant role in improving the quality of public service performance, public leaders also influence performance through their supervisory role.

A substantial body of literature underscores the critical role of leadership in initiating and sustaining organizational change, particularly within bureaucratic and institutional settings (Lesmana et al. 2022; Schulze and Pinkow 2020; Singgih et al. 2020). Leadership is increasingly viewed not only as a position of authority but also as a dynamic process that enables transformation by aligning people, structures, and values toward a shared vision and job satisfaction (Chella and Dadhabai 2024; Al Khajeh 2018; Khan, Nawaz, and Khan 2016). Scholars highlight how effective leadership can serve as an agent of change, influencing organizational culture and facilitating innovation (Abdeldayem and Aldulaimi 2020; Marlia et al. 2025). This perspective posits leaders as key mediators who can drive reform through strategic planning, motivation, and networked decision-making (Shvindina 2017). Such leadership-oriented transformations are essential in reconfiguring stagnant or resistant bureaucratic systems.

The second strand of research focuses on bureaucratic transformation, particularly in the context of public service improvement. Studies emphasize the relationship between leadership

style and employee performance, work engagement, and institutional accountability (Ariussanto et al. 2020; Karacsony 2021; Shafi et al. 2020; Tziner and Shkoler 2018). Additionally, leadership is seen as instrumental in enhancing the quality of public services, with performance-based and participatory models often yielding better results (Backhaus and Vogel 2022; Al Khajeh 2018; Lesmana et al. 2022; Wijaya, Prastyari, and Armanu 2019). These works illustrate how leadership interventions can restructure bureaucracies to become more responsive, transparent, and citizen-focused, reinforcing the growing importance of governance reform in decentralized political systems like Indonesia.

While leadership and bureaucracy are widely studied in administrative and management literature, anthropological research on leadership in aristocratic societies remains limited. Leadership carries symbolic as well as functional significance, particularly in regions like Yogyakarta, where bureaucratic institutions are historically influenced by hierarchical and aristocratic traditions (Aspinall and Fealy 2003; Harsono 2018; Nugroho, Handayani, and Karjoko 2024). The persistence of status-based systems embedded in Javanese political culture often complicates reform efforts. At the same time, this cultural context provides a rich ground for anthropological inquiry into the negotiation of power, legitimacy, and governance (Priyadi and Afrizal 2020). This study addresses this gap by examining how a leader disrupts the entrenched values in an aristocratic society while leveraging cultural capital to facilitate bureaucratic transformation.

Bureaucratic studies are mostly carried out in the fields of political science and state administration. In this case, the research draws on anthropological, historical, and administrative approaches, with anthropology playing a

more prominent role. An in-depth study of changes in attitudes and performance of bureaucrats in Yogyakarta is important, given that Mayor Herry Zudianto's systemic leadership during his administration has successfully implemented the principles of new governance, positioning the government as a "servant of the community". This reflects a shift in leadership style grounded in "lessons learned" and aimed at improving leadership practices (Johnson 2007). In a social context, the term 'servant' often carries a negative connotation, as it implies a hierarchical relationship in which the servant is subordinate to the master, reflecting a structure of dominance and submission.

Although extensive studies have addressed leadership in public administration, few have investigated the phenomenon through an anthropological lens, particularly within culturally embedded bureaucracies shaped by aristocratic legacies (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2021). This research offers a novel contribution by examining how culturally rooted leadership practices can serve as a mechanism of bureaucratic transformation. Focusing on the case of Yogyakarta, it captures how a mayor's leadership—shaped by both entrepreneurial experience and cultural awareness—reconfigures power dynamics, redefines the relationship between civil servants and citizens, and challenges deeply rooted hierarchical traditions. This study not only highlights leadership as a cultural performance but also expands the anthropological discourse on governance in post-authoritarian contexts.

With the background outlined above, this study is guided by the following research questions: a) How does leadership serve as a mechanism for bureaucratic transformation in an aristocratic society? b) What strategies does the mayor use to shift bureaucratic norms from hierarchical dominance to public service

orientation? and c) How do civil servants respond to this leadership model, and what are the implications for governance performance? This study assumes that leadership grounded in cultural legitimacy and personal authority can use entrepreneurial strategies and relational approaches to drive bureaucratic transformation, reduce institutional resistance, and enhance governance effectiveness in an aristocratic society.

Bureaucratic practices within government are inherently complex. This research focuses on the leadership model adopted by the Yogyakarta mayor in managing bureaucratic institutions, particularly their role in shifting mindsets around reform among both leaders and civil servants, who serve as key state functionaries in Yogyakarta. The central question is whether the mayor, as the regional leader, has established a leadership model that serves as a best practice in good governance, covering both policy formulation and implementation. Moreover, by examining how power is used to influence others, this study explores the mechanisms through which the mayor exercises his authority.

This study is driven by the need to examine leadership as a vehicle for bureaucratic reform within a sociopolitical context shaped by enduring feudal and aristocratic values. Utilizing a qualitative ethnographic framework, the research adopts a case study design that is complemented by historical and administrative analysis. Empirical data were collected through participant observations and in-depth interviews with 14 informants, with various stakeholders, including mayors, echelon officials, civil servants, members of the public, academics, and retired employees. These primary data sources are complemented by secondary data, including government documents, institutional

archives, and media coverage. Analytical interpretation draws upon the lens of interpretive anthropology, emphasizing the cultural symbolism, social interactions, and leadership discourses that characterized the transformation of municipal governance in Yogyakarta.

To provide a comprehensive view, it is essential to examine the diverse perspectives of stakeholders, particularly in the Yogyakarta City context, regarding power dynamics in the pursuit of good governance. This study is framed by the understanding that cities hold a strategically important role within the Regional Autonomy framework, operating as key units of governance. Accordingly, the selection of a singular city as the primary focus facilitates an in-depth exploration of the exercise of mayoral authority in the provisioning of public services to the local community. The methodological approach adopted in this study is rooted in ethnography, a paradigm frequently employed in the discipline of anthropology. Hence, ethnographic data collection techniques were systematically employed, resulting in a comprehensive case study.

A Leadership Success Driven by Commitment to Improve the Quality of Public Services

Following the 1998 reform period, the Yogyakarta City government bureaucracy absorbed many former employees of the Department of Social Affairs and the Department of Information, which were disbanded by President Abdurahman Wahid. According to information from retired Yogyakarta City Regional Secretary Mr. S, the number of city government employees at the end of the 1990s, from around 3,000 people, swelled to 9,000 people because they were forced to accept transfers from two disbanded departments. As

regional secretary at that time, he appealed to employees:

"Please, for those who have enough part time, maybe you should consider applying for early retirement, if you want, you know, if not, I can't guarantee a position, because our positions are only limited, there are a lot of people, also for those who are old enough, maybe they have other income. Why don't you think about retiring so you can focus on your business?"

According to him, this appeal was counter-productive, as he said, "Indeed, there were one or two who applied for early retirement, but that was not much because the Javanese culture views the status, 'projo', as a civil servant, as still strong. A retired third echelon official, Mr. Br, whose position was often shifted, also said:

"Kanggoné pegawai negeri, ki piyé-piyé tetep kajèn" (for the civil service community, however, they are still honorable).

As a result of the influx of transferred employees, apart from increasing the work volume of the Regional Civil Service Agency in preparing and placing employees, the Yogyakarta city government was also faced with problems of rank and expertise. Some of those transferred from outside city government agencies held high ranks, but their skills did not align with the core functions and responsibilities of the local government. At that time, the Regional Secretary, Mr. Sbk, consulted with a government governance expert at the Master of Public Administration at Gadjah Mada University. The consultation recommended that the Yogyakarta city government downsize the number of staff, with the concept of "poor structure, rich function". However, according to the Regional Secretary, the suggestion given could not be implemented because:

"If it is really as suggested by the expert from UGM, we are the ones who are confused.

Where should I put so many thousands of employees?"

At the beginning of the 2001 period, the Yogyakarta city government was operating with complex personnel arrangements that required special handling. The regional secretary had to exercise restraint and diplomacy to manage tensions between long-serving city government employees and those transferred from other departments or agencies. The number of city government employees, according to Mr. KS, Head of the Organizational Section, in 2011 was around 11,000 people, the majority of whom were educators, around 7,000 people, while those serving in the government sphere were only around 5,000 people.

In this case, as the regulator and manager of human resources, the Regional Secretary must be able to manage personnel effectively. Long-serving city government employees often feel they have greater entitlement to promotion and should be prioritized over newer transfers. The pattern used is to use the Rank Order List or commonly known as DUK (Daftar Urutan Kepangkatan). Transferred employees, who, according to them, are "*wong neko, mung nunut urip*" (immigrants, just boarding for a living), must know themselves not to be too ambitious about getting a position. An employee at the Regional Civil Service Agency office, Mr. ZH, moved from the South Sulawesi Regional Government to join his wife, who works as a teacher. Although he held an Echelon 3A position, he acknowledged the need to 'know his place' within the new bureaucratic environment.

Mr. ZH felt very grateful to be with his family and had no ambition to pursue a higher position, even though he recognized that his colleagues were highly capable. His educational background (a bachelor's degree from an Islamic higher

education Institution, IAIN Makassar) was unrelated to his role as Head of Administration. However, when moved to the Yogyakarta city government, there were several transferred employees who successfully pursued careers as third or second-echelon officials. A former Indonesian language teacher, Mr. ES, successfully led the Taman Pintar Office, which he managed by applying business principles.

A former employee of the Department of Information, Mr. AB, was transferred to the city government and then placed as head of the Fire Department, he said:

"Previously, my office motto was 'never-ending fire', now I am a firefighter."

He then rose to echelon 2A to become head of the Transportation Service until his retirement. A former teacher of Mrs. L, when she served as secretary of the Agriculture and Veterinary Office, was able to present a proposal regarding the Yogyakarta City Hygienic Sea Fish Market project to the Central Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Department. The project was then successfully financed by the central government, although in the end it did not develop further and was closed because the Yogyakarta people's demand for fish produce was low.

When Presenting is like Walking into a Firing Squad: Leadership as a Battle Arena

The process of presenting an activity plan for officials who were not prepared felt like walking into a firing squad. Various terms emerged regarding the discussion atmosphere when dealing with Mayor Herry Zudianto. Some said it was like walking into a firing squad because Herry Zudianto criticized the presentation of a program. Some feel that entering the presenting room (often referred to as Operation Room or

Ops Room) was like entering the Emergency Unit (EU) or operating room because after leaving the meeting room with Herry Zudianto, people would be scared and covered in sweat. According to Mr. PW, a retired former Head of General Affairs who often prepared work plan presentation events, people had to be able to operate their laptops when discussing with the mayor. If your PowerPoint presentation faltered at the outset, the mayor would immediately reprimand and scold you. Then he ordered the Head of General Affairs in a high tone, "Reschedule!"

The term Ops Room, like an emergency room, often appeared when people describe the atmosphere of discussions with Herry Zudianto. Mrs. L, Head of the Archives and Library Office, shared a funny story about the Ops Room. One time, several people were chatting about Herry Zudianto, assuming that he was not in the meeting room. Suddenly, his voice came through the loudspeaker: '*Hayo ngopo!*' (Hey, what's going on?). Everyone was surprised because they did not expect the mayor to hear all the conversations in the Ops room. It turns out that there is CCTV monitoring all activities in the room, and it can be seen by the mayor in his office. Mrs. L felt:

"Wah duh, nèk ning ruang operasi (ruang rapat), kowe koyo arep diuji, tapi seneng wedi, ya, engko gèk gèk nganu, gèk gèk nganu. Aku yo wedi, tapi kéné sing penting kudu siap, angger wis yo wis" (if you're in the Ops room, you're going to be tested [it's like being cooked], you must be afraid that something might happen. I was afraid too, yes, but the important thing is to be ready; things shall too pass).

A former head of the Regional Planning Agency, Bappeda, Mr. ES, said that he was often asked to present before Herry Zudianto in the mayor's presentation room. When he met Herry

Zudianto, his body was always drenched in sweat, and when he left the room, it was seen by other people so people said he just came out of the operating room of a hospital. After some time, it turned out that he had a health problem with his kidneys, so that when there was a problem or even the slightest burden on his mind, it would trigger excessive sweat production. At that time, people interpreted that he was stressed because of discussions with Herry Zudianto, even though his relationship with Herry Zudianto was very good. However, according to Mr. HP, the former chairman of Bappeda:

"Mr. Es, ning ruang operasi (ruang rapat walikota) angger ketemu Pak Herry, keringeté metu kabèh sak jagung jagung, amega wedi karo Pak Herry" ("Mr. ES, in the Ops room, when he met Mr. Herry, his sweat was all coming out as the size of corn kernels, it was gone because it was already afraid of Mr. Herry).

One official, Mr. S, formerly Head of the Regional Information Agency, would often be hospitalized from stress after being summoned by Herry Zudianto. Yet, after retiring, he remained in good health. According to the story of Mr. AB, a retired Head of the Transportation Service:

"Mr. S has a small mentality, so if he is called, let alone scolded, he doesn't come in, the office boy is being scolded. If tomorrow he doesn't come in, he'd be scolded, and if he was called he doesn't dare to do it himself. Invite the staff, little, small-hearted."

Mr. TJ added:

"It's true that Mr. S can't follow, he's often sick, he's given up being an expert staff member."

"wis Pak TJ, aku seneng. De'è nandes, tapi de'è mung menengan" (that's it, Mr. TJ, I'm happy [comfortable], he feels very hurt, and it keeps leaving, but he's just a quiet person).

Facing the mayor with the emotional character of Herry Zudianto creates an image as if every day someone is being scolded. A second echelon official, Mr. BS, who worked in the Council Secretary's Office, recounted the dialogue when he met Mr. AB, the Head of the Transportation Service:

Mr. BS: *"Jo, saiki, opo? Rebo?"* (Jo, what day is it? Wednesday?).

Mr. AB: *"Sopo sing muni Rebo, saiki ki Senèn"* (who said it's Wednesday, today is Monday).

Mr. BS: *"Bener"* (that's right).³

In Java, *Senèn* has two meanings: either it's a "name of a day" or "being scolded". When they say it's *senèn*, it means that they were being scolded every day. The Head of the Transportation Service responded again while laughing: "Your words Jo, I really want to be entertained again by HZ" (I just got scolded by HZ).

Mr. HP, a retiree who previously served as a Development Assistant and also had the opportunity to become Regional Secretary, also said:

"I used to often be invited by Mr. Herry when he was scolding the staff, I accompanied him when, for example, he called the head of the department, then he would get angry, I was told to watch if the head of the SKPD did something wrong (like this), then I was told to solve the problem."

As a result of the mayor's leadership style, some officials became reluctant to engage with him directly. According to several accounts, when the mayor was passing by, those who felt offended or uncomfortable would try to avoid him, sometimes by pretending to enter a nearby room. Poiné waton mlebu (basically as long as he entered), or if he was seen from afar, rush somewhere else.

Government Employees are just a “Tool”: Changes in Leadership Style

Given that bureaucracy operates on a hierarchical structure with defined career paths (Weber 1978) emphasized that individuals naturally aspire to move from lower, less prestigious and lower-paying positions to higher ones in pursuit of better income and status. Civil servants are a type of work that is not only a means of earning income, but also hold status values in society. Institutional practices are strongly influenced by prevailing ideas in every aspect of society (Bendix and Guillén 2019). In the history of Indonesian government administration, this type of work occupies an important position, both as a social status and as a state apparatus (Sutherland 1979). Weber recognized early on that working as a bureaucrat carried social rewards, as it set individuals apart from the governed population (Gerth and Wright Mills 2014). Herry Zudianto disrupted the existing system, deliberately and with consequences. He often likened his approach to a car: as long as it runs fast, that's what matters. He repeated this analogy at every opportunity: "We are servants, and I am the chief servant of society".

In the absence of a clear career pattern, some officials end up returning to their original positions, which is not good for personnel development. Mr. WR, who at the beginning of Herry Zudianto's administration had served as Head of the Transportation Service, finally returned to his original position in the final years of Herry Zudianto's leadership. Mr. HP, retired Head of Bappeda, concluded:

"Pak Herry is right, he has a lot of ideas and the problem is that his staff are not necessarily able to follow them, so the ideas are going around and around because the human resources are not prepared and then

after Mr. Herry leaves everything is a mess, like Louis 14th, 'after I have nothing', career problems, yes that is sing (which) according to him is suitable to be chosen (as head of department. If there's someone better, he will be demoted, straight away, trial and error, so don't try on the road. That's better), just move until someone asks, "Sir, how come it's my mistake to move?" "What?" "Oh, you are not incompetent, but just not suitable", so if you are not suitable, how to sort it?"

In terms of personnel placement, Herry Zudianto viewed staff as tools. If one did not function well, it should simply be replaced. Many believed he had no intention of hindering anyone's career or causing harm when reshuffling his team. However, when individuals felt hurt or disappointed, it was often perceived that he was indifferent and gave little thought to the personal impact of his decisions, so that people judged him to have no *subo sito* (politeness in his behavior).

When the authors visited the house of Mr. TJ, the retired Head of Bappeda, he asked:

"Pak, panjenengan tau krungu lakon wayang 'Antasena dadi Ratu'? Aku mangsuli "Mr. Herry koyo ngono?" terus deknèn ngguyu lan ngomong: "dudu aku lho sing ngomong, tapi panjenengan" (Sir, have you ever heard the wayang entitled 'Antasena becomes Ratu'? I spontaneously answered, "Is Mr. Herry like that?" he then laughed and said, "It's not me who said it, but you].

In the *wayang* (puppets) story, the character Antasena is the third child of Bima and Dewi Urangayu. He is described as innocent but firm in his convictions. When talking to anyone, he always uses the *ngoko* (coarse Javanese) language, so it seems as if he does not know etiquette. However, this shows his honesty, where he really does not like worldly pleasantries. As a former subordinate, Mr. TJ observed Herry Zudianto's figure to the point

where he raised the question of the wayang play.

It can be said that the career advancement system under Herry Zudianto's leadership was inconsistent because there were many personnel placements that did not follow the Rank Order List. However, Mr. AY, a former second echelon official who now serves as Development Assistant in Batang Regency, explained:

"The budget system and innovations used during Herry Zudianto's time were performance-based. In the past, the DUK had expired, but there was a cross-assessment, vertically and horizontally, that's where the approach will be based on a role approach, yesterday the bureaucracy was always The approach is authority, the one who has the authority is the SKPD, if we pursue it in the name of authority we have to be correct in the name of the law, if we carry authority, it means that we will miss it and lead to an approach of authority, I am the leader, which means that's where it was during my assessment to become an inspector. Seven people were tested by Mr. Herry and the third party UGM, it was pure clear, all my seniors, at that time there was one who was my Head of Division, which means it was a coincidence that I was able to pass, so there were no KKN products, let alone money, nothing, after that it was a coincidence that I The leader is my Head of Division, my boss when I was at the inspectorate."

According to Mr. AW, an unusual change in career patterns, such as the appointment of a secretary who was an STPDN (Institute of Home Affairs Governance) graduate, led to widespread disappointment. From the start, many employees had pursued government work with the expectation of a clear career path and upward mobility. When that system broke down, it created frustration, as positions were perceived to be given based on personal closeness rather than merit, leading some to work with less motivation or accountability. As

a comparison, Mrs. AS and Mrs. YR are both graduates of UGM Government Science in 1994. However, their career trajectories diverged. Mrs. AS worked mostly in civil service roles that were less visible to the mayor, while Mrs. YR was assigned to the protocol division, giving her closer proximity to the mayor. As a result, Mrs. YR advanced more quickly, reaching an Echelon 2B position, while Mrs. AS remained at Echelon 3B. Mrs. AS's career path may be considered more stable, with gradual, age-aligned promotions and a safer work environment.

As a result of a position placement system that was not based on DUK, disharmony often occurred in the work environment, especially between superiors and subordinates, due to age differences. In normal situations, superiors were supposed to be older than subordinates, but the opposite happened. A senior Camat (subdistrict head) once worked with a young sub-district head who was much younger in age and experience, so people said:

"Lha kaé, Camaté karo Sekcamé podo waé kuthuk karo babon" (that's right, the Subdistrict head and his Secretary as a chick with its mother).

The secretary in question also knew that the sub-district head was nervous, so he said:

"Ora usah dipikir, koé rasah wedi karo aku" (never mind, don't be afraid of me).

Various comments emerged from employees, both active and retired, when the Yogyakarta city government was led by Herry Zudianto for two periods: "koyo mèlu Londo" (like working with the Dutch because they are very disciplined), "padakké koyo nang Margaria" (likened to Herry Zudianto's Margaria company). To the point that a retired third echelon official, Mr. Br, said:

"Yo sak omong-omongané pegawai ming iso dikuyo-kuyo, padakké babu waé. Kon"

nyambut gawé koyo ngopo sak aboté ning nèk lèh ngongkon kepénak, ora kroso abot. Ning nèk sing ngongkon ngoyak-ngoyak koyo bos, sing nandangi ora lilo. Nèk koyo ngono, mergo asalé seko wong bisnis dudu pegawai, piyé aboté dadi wong cilik. Deknen yo bos, ora ngrasakké dadi wong cilik. Sayangé Pak Herry ora nguwongké. Yo ngono kui" (whatever the commenter likes, the employee will be treated arbitrarily, taken for granted, likened to a servant, a person ordered to work like anything, even though it's heavy, but if we politely order him, we will do it sincerely, but the way he's always giving orders, always playing orders like a boss prioritizing power, those who do things that are not sincere, because he came from business, not the children of employees, how it's hard to be a commoner. Unfortunately, he's a boss; he doesn't feel like a commoner; he doesn't treat people like a human being, that's all).

The issue of open interpretation also came up when we informed one of the informants that we intended to study Herry Zudianto's leadership. Mr. BS immediately commented:

"I can conclude that Mr. Herry is like an Axe deodorant advertisement. The first impression is very tempting, after that, it's up to you."

A former employee of the Margaria company, Mr. GS, who now works as a civil servant in a sub-district in Gondokusuman District, Yogyakarta City, said:

"Yo bener hasil, yo koyo dioyak-oyak uwong gitu, opo-opo kudu iso, Saya itu kudu iso nyupir, iso ngepel lantai, ndandani listrik, iso gawé begèsteng, masangi begèsteng, ugo dodol batik barang" (yes, it's indeed work, it's like being chased by someone, we must be able to do whatever, must be able to drive, mop the floor, repair the electricity, can make concrete iron columns, even sell batik).

The principle of efficiency was emphasized by Herry Zudianto, so that complaints often

emerged from both employees and himself as mayor. He believed that civil servants were already paid a salary and therefore they had to work without making any demands. On the other hand, civil servants believed differently, asking for additional honoraria and looking at work based on projects.

A former member of the DPRD, Mr. AN, who was known to be close to employees, said that when Herry Zudianto was no longer serving as mayor, several employees made comments that reflected the inner mood of civil servants in general:

"Wah... saiki iso ambegan" (wow, now I can breathe a sigh of relief).

During Herry Zudianto's time, they practically could not rest because of the high demands on their tasks and the need to complete them quickly. Some said:

"Wahhh, nèk wali kotané sing sak iki lungo kéné iso turu nglintek" (wow, if the current mayor is gone, the employees can sleep soundly).

The research results show that Herry Zudianto's background very clearly influenced his leadership style while serving as mayor of Yogyakarta from 2001 to 2011. In looking at the success of a program, he always based the results (output-oriented), often even on a profit-and-loss basis (profit-oriented). Herry Zudianto succeeded in making innovations in terms of licensing when the Yogyakarta city government was able to form a Licensing Service, which at that time was the first breakthrough in regional government.

Conclusion

This study has uncovered how bureaucratic leadership in Yogyakarta is being redefined amidst a complex interplay of aristocratic

heritage, modern governance demands, and local socio-cultural values. Through an ethnographic lens, it was found that leadership in the region remains deeply embedded in symbolic power and traditional legitimacy, even as it navigates state-imposed bureaucratic standards. This hybrid model of leadership reflects a dynamic adaptation rather than a total transformation, demonstrating the resilience and flexibility of local political culture in responding to bureaucratic reform.

The findings highlight the importance of contextualizing bureaucratic transformation within local cultural and historical settings. They suggest that leadership in public administration cannot be fully understood or reformed through standardized frameworks alone. Instead, cultural legitimacy and symbolic authority remain crucial elements in the acceptance and effectiveness of bureaucratic leadership, particularly in societies with strong traditional roots like Yogyakarta. This insight holds implications for policy implementation and reform efforts in similar socio-political contexts, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches.

Nevertheless, this study has its limitations. As an ethnographic inquiry conducted in a specific cultural and geographic setting, its findings may not be generalizable to other regions without similar traditional structures. Future research could expand on this work by conducting comparative studies in other aristocratic or traditional societies undergoing bureaucratic reform. Such research could further uncover how varying cultural narratives shape the transformation of leadership in the public sector. Furthermore, vertical studies, examining transformations over time, are also highly meaningful. For example, the involvement of media aspects in the transformation

process will enrich the body of research on cultural transformation in bureaucracy.[]

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