

The Expression Of Local Values In Performance Art Of Malang Mask Puppet

Robby Hidajat

Lecturing Staff in Study Program of Dance and Music Art Education
Faculty of Literature, Universitas Negeri Malang, PH- 081234230924
Robby.hidajat.fs@um.ac.id

Abstract: This article is written based on a research concerning Malang Mask Puppet in Malang Regency, East Java. Malang Mask Puppet is performance art on puppet genre and it has been growing widely in Malang region. This performance is played by dancers who wear mask in different characters. Public acknowledgment to this performance has been started since the article of Pigeaud in 1938. Malang Mask Puppet performance is led by puppet master and accompanied by Javanese gamelan music, and these components have been the standard of mask puppet performance since 18th century. Some informants of this research still found time in 1970s to witness their grandfathers acting as the dancer in mask puppet performance. Therefore, research is aimed to explore local values expressed in Malang Mask Puppet performance, especially when it presents the Story of Panji. This story becomes a central theme in mask puppet performance because it represents psychological wellbeing, life philosophy, and social conditions of Malang people. Mask puppet performance is also played for many events, such as sacred ritual, tolak balak ceremony, and hajatan celebration. Method of research includes interview, observation, and review of documentation. Data analysis uses interpretation theory by which the author acts as main instrument to understand, comprehend, and internalize information provided by informants. Result of research indicates that three local values are expressed in Malang Mask Puppet performance, and these are (1) strengthening connectivity to ancestral spirits, (2) enforcing social solidarity and social bonding, and (3) signing initiation phase.

Keywords: mask puppet, local values, traditional performance art

1. Introduction

Performance art in puppet (wayang) genre has been extensively growing in the old days. An ethnographer from Holland, Pigeaud, has noticed that mask puppet performance was a well known art activity in Malang Region, East Java. Malang Regent in 1930s, R.A.A. Soeria Adiningrat, was once being helpful to the mask puppet performance art through his intensive fostering for the conservation of this art. It was him who welcomes his important guests at the regent mansion with the presentation of mask puppet performance. Dancers are mostly farmers who have dexterity, strength, agility, and firmness, and they are led by village chief. Dancers who are the most frequently invited to the regent mansion are those from Pucangsanga Village, a village in eastern part of Malang Region, which nowadays it locates in Tumpang District [1]. In 1950s, dancers from Pucangsanga Village did not have enough proteges to retain their existence, but there was one dancer with high enthusiasm to teach dance lovers from many places in East Java. This dancer was named Samud. His name was very popular at the time, and it remained to be commemorated by Malang people until 1970s. An observer, and also choreographer, named Munardi, took intensive learning on mask puppet performance from Samud [2]. Besides Samud, there is another popular figure in mask puppet performance. He lives in Mbesar Village and is given a name Tirtowinoto. He is a dancer and also puppet master (dalang) in mask puppet performance. In many occasions, Tirtowinoto is the puppet master of the performance played by Samud as dancer. After the chief of Jabung Village decides to establish Mask Puppet Society in the village, the most frequently invited puppet master for mask puppet performance is Tirtowinoto, and even he is the absolute option for ruwatan ceremony (Kusbandi, interview on 23 July 2018). Publications concerning mask puppet started to be found easily since the end of 1970s, and the most intensive writer who publicize mask puppet in various books and printed media is Munardi [3]. Other writings about mask puppet are

given by Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono, a mask puppet master and also descendant of Tirtowonoto. Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono was not only traditional dancer and puppet master, but also academician proven by his membership of alumni association of Indonesia Academy of Dance Art (ASTI = Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia) in Yogyakarta from which he graduated in 1984. In 1990, he wrote a book about puppet master with Handri Supriyanto, also an academician with a degree on Master of Education for Indonesia Literature. Their book was titled *Dramatari Wayang Topeng Malang* [4]. written by taking references from Munardi's books. The dissemination of mask puppet performance art in Malang begins on 50 years after its public acknowledgment in the beginning of 20th century. The popularity of mask puppet performance starts from villages in the east part of Malang Region, especially those in the east bank of Brantas River, and disseminates to the west part of Malang Region, notably to villages in the west bank of Brantas River. Many mask puppet societies were established in 1970s on the west part of Malang Region, and each society represents the village where it is founded, for example, mask puppet societies of Sliilir, Kedungmangga, Jatiguwi, Jambuwer, kalipare, Pijombo, and Senggreng [5]. Mask puppet performance in Malang is often presented in communal spritual activities, such as bersih desa, ruwatan, and fulfillment of nadhar. Social events, including hajatan mantu (wedding) and hajatan khitanan (circumcision), are also celebrated with mask puppet performance. Malang Mask Puppet has attained its glorious day in 1970s when it becomes a popular attraction that people, mainly villagers, are willing to wait in the crowd for seeing the performance. Kangsen, a chief of Jabung Village, is one of many individuals who successfully develops the potentials of his villagers to be the artists of mask puppet. Mask Puppet Society of Karya Bakti was frequently invited to entertain some events out of Malang City, and its performance was considered as competitive over Ludruk Performance Art. Moreover, Mask Puppet Society of Asmarabangun gets its popularity from invitation

to present mask puppet performance in bersih desa. This event is a way of villagers to express their gratitude and submission in order to be blessed with fertility, health, and safety. The function of mask puppet performance in bersih desa still remains in Pijiombo Village. By presenting mask puppet performance for bersih desa, Pijiombo villagers expect that water sources keep flowing from pundhen Mbah Ngarijan and provide abundance of favors (Harsoyo, interview on 6 August 2018). Nowadays, mask puppet performance is not only presented for custom ceremonies, but also used for tourist attraction. Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono presents mask puppet performance on Mangundharmo Art Gallery in Tumpang, and Tri Handaya organizes mask puppet performance in once a month, mainly on the day of senen legi. Youths in Jabung Village have created a community of mask artisans but mask puppet performance is still used to enforce the label of thematic village to Jabung Village. Since 2015, other village, Palawijen, has worked on to obtain the label of thematic village. There is an old site in Palawijen village related with the history of Malang Mask Puppet, and the label may give this village a leverage to be the center of Malang Mask Puppet. To be noted, this Palawijen historical site has been written on Piegaud's notes (Wahyudi, interview on 9 July 2018). However, Palawijen village began to lost its fame since 1940s but Palawijen dancers were often hired to represent Jabung Village to play mask puppet performance. Grave site of legendary mask puppet dancer, Reni, has been successfully recognized in public cemetery in Palawijen Village. After some restorations and being used as background stage of mask puppet performance, this site helps the village to recover its name. Social activists have elevated status of this village by developing a label of "thematic village". Both development and dissemination of mask puppet performance in Malang indicate the relationship between artists' actions and performance art's functions in people life. Both actions and functions are significantly related and also important indicators that must be considered when observing local values expressed in mask puppet performance. These local values indeed enforce the existence of conserver individuals or stakeholders. The conservation of Malang Mask Puppet shall be important because local values expressed by mask puppet must be redefined as the legacy of cultural thought. As said by Geertz, culture is a symbol system suitable to develop communication [6].

2. Method of Racrech

Research method is qualitative descriptive because this research describes words and actions of research subject based on empirical activity. Emic data play important roles when thoughts must be explained as cultural consciences. Theoretical viewpoint in this research is functional [7]. It means that Mask Puppet is mostly functioned as a part of bersih desa ritual, and mask puppet performance is presented during the procession of gebyak suguh pundhen. To be understood, bersih desa ritual is the procession of worship to the village ancestral spirits, and it is carried out in front of pundhen belik kurung and pundhen Mbah Ngarijan in Pijiombo Village. By this procession, people pray for the security and fertility of the village. Spiritualism and worship to ancestral spirits are the ancient belief of agrarian people, and "puppet" (wayang) is the main instrument to this worship [8]. The elements supporting mask puppet performance in Malang, East Java, are social system,

religion, esthetic, and socialism. The collected data are explanations concerning attitudes and actions of mask puppet conserver societies. These explanations are referred to the words and actions of informants. Some informants involved in this research are Sumantri (63 years old), a karawitan expert from Malang, Tri Handaya (45 years old), Soeroso (47 years old), Harsoyo (70 years old), and Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono (64 years old). Data are accepted as empirical experience. The author acts as the main instrument of research. Data analysis is multi-disciplines involving various aspects, such as religion, history, politic, and performance art [9]. The author also stands as interpreter and has empathy to the experience of informants [10].

3. DATA EXPOSITION

Data exploration was done by interlacing a meeting with competent informants who are structurally engaged with mask puppet performance art. The exploration is conducted with dramaturgy theory, and this theory asserts that drama always consists of two elements, respectively: (1) players, who present mask puppet performance, including dancers and puppet masters, and (2) musicians, precisely players of Javanese gamelan, and gamelan is always key instrument in mask puppet performance. Data were explored from the perspective of players in mask puppet performance, such as Puppet Master, Dancer, and Musician. Kendang player is consulted as representative of musician. Data form is the function of mask puppet performance art. Concerning with actions, the story to be played must be that appreciated by audiences. Given this fact, then data exposition in this research tries to elaborate three functions of Malang Mask Puppet. All these functions constitute the presence of gebyak, a performance played on certain time, at certain place, and with certain story. Three kinds of gebyak are known, such as: (1) gebyak suguh pundhen, (2) gebyak tolak balak, and (3) gebyak tanggapan. After conducting exploration, a question arises, which is, "What local values are expressed in mask puppet performance in Malang?"

3.1 Gebyak Suguh Pundhen

Gebyak Suguh Pundhen is performance art presented for the procession of suguh (giving offerings) to pundhen. The term "pundhen" is defined as a thing that is respected (pundhi-pundhi) or glorified because it has special charms, and also has been considered as sacred and magic [11]. Gebyak is performed by villagers collectively. It is organized once a year on village birthday. Date of birthday is determined based on the date when the place was validated into the current village. Suguh Pundhen is the activity of pray and respect to ancestral spirits, or dhanyang desa, whom were recognized for their merit in opening land to establish the village. Time, place, and presentation of traditional performance art are determined based on wisik gaib (spiritual inspiration) received by kamituwa through dreams. In Kedungmangga Village, Pakisaji District, gebyak suguh pundhen is presented on the day of Senin Legi in month of Ruwah based on Javanese calendar, and usually performed at Pundhen Belik Kurung. The stories played are often the titles about the development of nation, such as Jenggala Mbangun Candi, Mbalihe Pusaka Gedhong Semoro Denok, or Umbul-Umbul Mojopura [12]. In Pijiombo Village, Wonosari District, the procession is conducted on the day of Senin Legi in month of Selo. Stories played are mostly about wahyu (inheritance of divine power), and among the titles is

Tumurune Wahyu Sri Rejeki. The place of performance is at pundhen mbah Ngarijan. In other villages, *suguh* pundhen desa is carried out during *memetri* (village great meal), which is an activity aimed to pray for blessings of *seger* (fertility), *waras* (protection), and *slamet* (safety).

3.2 Gebtak Tolak Balak

Javanese believe on the existence of predator spirits, precisely the wicked spirits who threatens peoples classified in *sukerto* (endangered) class. This class comprises with souls considered as dirty by birth or action. The sinners who expect for freedom from any threats must serve *tolak balak* ceremony. *Tolak balak* is differentiated into two, namely (a) *ruwatan sukerto*, and (b) *ruwatan nadhar* [13].

- (a) *Ruwatan sukerto* is conducted by presenting mask puppet performance with the story of *murwakala*. This story talks about kids from endangered class who must be offered to be fed by *Bethara Kala*, a giant, son of *Siwa* and *Dewi Uma*. *Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono* is one of acknowledgeable puppet master for *ruwatan* in the eastern part of *Malang*. This procession mostly involves offerings and mask puppet performance in front of house of the host (*Pramono*, interview on 23 June 2018).
- (b) *Ruwatan nadhar* is arranged by individual who takes a vow for certain occasion. This vow (or promise) is made because vow-taker feels it as the last resort to deal with problem. Term for this vow is *nadhar*, and it is considered as settled after serving *ruwatan nadhar*. *Ruwatan nadhar* is often performed with story or by mask puppet society as wished in *nadhar*. Time of *ruwatan* is determined usually by puppet master's suggestion. Place for *ruwatan* is mostly at the front of the host's house. *Asmarabangun Mask Puppet Society* from *Kedungmangga Village* has once be invited to perform *ruwatan nadhar* in *Jatiguwi*, and the invitor desires to settle the vow because the invitor has successfully been appointed to civil service (*Handaya*, interview on 20 April 2018).

3.3. Gebyak Tanggapan

Gebyak Tanggapan is mask puppet performance arranged by individual who has certain interest (*hajatan*). There are two kinds of *hajatan*, namely (a) *hajatan mantu* for wedding, and (b) *hajatan khitanan* for circumcision.

- (a) *Hajatan mantu* (wedding) is wedding party that must be held by bride's parent. After a man proposes a woman, then wedding party is held at woman's premises. During the wedding, the groom is escorted by the companions to the bride's house. At wedding night, mask puppet performance is presented. *Malang* people consider this performance as expectancy and therefore, the story is often about the meeting of bride and groom. It is not surprising if the title of story is not far away from *Rabine Panji* (the marriage of *Panji*) [14].
- (b) *Hajatan khitanan* (circumcision) is an event that must be held by parent who has a boy at his early grown up, especially in *Moslem* family. It is genuinely *moslem* tradition but over times, it has been considered as *Javanese* custom. *Khitanan* or *circumcision* is a sign that the kid has been in the stage of *akhil balik* or growing up. Through this event, the kid is expected to be man of kindness. This expectancy is usually expressed through the *Story of Panji Laras*.

4. Analysis

Based on the analysis of function, it is found *Malang Mask Puppet* has three functions, respectively: (1) function of ritual, aimed to strengthen connectivity of people to ancestral spirits, (2) function of recovery, aimed to develop social immunity, and (3) function of social or society, designed to sign the initiation phase.

(1) Function of Ritual: Connectivity to Ancestral Spirits

Mask puppet performance art in *Malang, East Java*, is presented with puppet pattern (*wayang*), and the presentation comprises with some elements such as puppet master (*dalang*), puppet character (player or dancer), and musician (*gamelan* player). All these elements are an harmonious unity that can be interpreted as *Javanese* cosmos pattern consisting of over-world (*dalang*), middle-world (puppet player), and under-world (*gamelan*). The connectivity of all these worlds represents spiritualism of agrarian peoples who always respect nature as their life orientation (*laku* or *lakon*). It is also said that the position of *laku* (life journey) as *kasunyatan* (reality) is made of those three elements, with *dalang* referring to the activity of *nguripi* (life conserver), *anak wayang* standing as *urip* (to live), and *gamelan* representing *panguripan* (life). *Javanese* cosmology expresses human religiosity through rituals of *memetri desa* or *bersih desa*. Such spiritual expressions is integrated with expectancy, and the outcome is *dongo* (pray), and the most recited pray is *dongo seger kewarasan*. There are three behavior patterns expressed in mask puppet performance, respectively: *madep* (facing toward), during which all characters always appear before audiences; *sembah* (giving respect); and *suguh* (presenting performance) to audiences. These three behaviors shall give lessons to the youths concerning how to respect elders or someone older. During *Great Day of Idul Fitri*, *moslem* tradition often requires *Javanese* to give *sungkem* to the ancestors, and the point of this activity is to express attitudes of *madep*, *sembah*, and *suguh*. This vertical *Javanese* cosmology represents a relationship between human with its immanence nature and supranatural power with its transcendental character. *Zoetmulder* describes this relationship as *manunggal* (allying self with divinity) [15]. Cosmology expressed by mask puppet is horizontal, represented by the relationship between *kamituwa* (elder) as *pancer* (center) of society/social affairs, and *pundhen* as *pancer* of spirituality [16]. During *bersih desa*, this connectivity is shown by the procession of *arak-arakan* (small parade) from *Kamituwa's* house to village *pundhen*.

(2) Function of Recovery: Social Immunity

Ruwatan is a way to deliver recovery (social immunity) from many psychological traumas by giving adoration to the traditional myths. *Mask Puppet* is then functioned as social rehabilitation, to ensure that someone can be saved from the threatening dangers. The danger itself is mostly related with the myth of giant, son of *Siwa* (*Betara Guru*) named *Betara Kala* [17]. Traditionally, *ruwatan* is a value order that suggests human to carry out "life cleansing" ceremony. This ceremony is to acknowledge the substance with the nature of *nguripi* (life keeper), which is shown in mask puppet performance through the presence of *Gunungsari* character, who is considered as transformation of *Wisnu* or *nur* (light). Occasionally, this character is adored as genuine puppet master of the life. Life cleansing is done by *Wisnu* as life

keeper. Wisnu is manifested in white color (nur) to signify “pure” or “holiness”, and the existence of Wisnu is the balance for the presence of Betara Kala signed with red color. Both red and white colors produce a complement called bang-tih, which is manifested in the form of jenang abang (a porridge of sticky rice colored red and white). This porridge is also named as jenang sengkala, an important element in tolak-balak ritual.

(3) Function of Social/Society: Signing Initiation Phase

Javanese tradition has been known with social space provided to the society to execute initiation phase (transition ritual) either for signifying puberty or unification period between two individuals as husband and wife. Mask puppet performance enforces this initiation phase. Boy is represented by mask, while girl is represented by dancer. Both are united and creating new personality. Boy who is inaugurated to become man is expected to have strong determination to develop his self-potential, and to be eager on hard-work and also willing to improve his living standard. Man is epitomized as “heaven” to his wife. The story played in puberty celebration must indicate transition from a boy to a man. The celebration is announced to the relatives and neighbors, at least to let them know that the boy in a family has been grown into an adult, who is then ready to take job and also responsibilities. The recommended title for the story is Panji Laras. This name is given to one of many sons from Panji Asmarabangun, but this son is grown by his mother in the jungle until he masters his father’s courage and gallantry. The symbol is a rooster, which signifies the description of “powerful man”. Indeed, Panji Laras is powerful man when he beats Panji Gurowongso. Moreover, the unification of two individuals to become a couple of husband and wife is played through the title Rabine Panji (the marriage of Panji). Based on this definition, man, before binding a woman as a wife or garwa (piece of soul), must pass the exams of sacrifice, struggle, and loyalty. Panji is the symbol of true love and loyalty, and the expression of loyalty is usually shown by farming ritual [18]. By this position, Panji Asmarabangun symbolizes unification of man and woman, or precisely, the encounter between Panji Asmarabangun and Dewi Sekartaji. The eternal love journey of both characters has its peak like the coalescence of Sun and Moon. Raspers believed that Story of Panji is reflecting the meeting of Sun and Moon [19]. The initiation period is a peak (or threshold) of transition when someone leaves critical condition toward better condition signified with stability, balance, and unification. Zoetmulder asserts that mask and mask wearer (dancer) are symbols of unification, which Javanese calls as manunggal (Zoetmulder, 2000:310).

5. Conclusion

Mask puppet performance in Malang is closely related with the pattern of Malang culture. Historical review shows that mask puppet performance as traditional culture empowers life existence of people who conserve it. Values expressed in mask puppet performance are representing the activity of society, such as: (1) religiosity values, which include faith, obedience, and respect, and by emphasizing these values, people expect the abundance of social welfare from the divine power, and it is facilitated by putting mask puppet performance to be functioned into ritual realms; (2) social values, which mostly concern with safety, where mask puppet performance is functioned in tolak balak ceremony;

and (3) balance values, which comprise of tolerance and kinship bonding, where mask puppet performance is presented to entertain people during hajatan.

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Author Profile



Author: Dr. Robby Hidajat, M.Sn. Lecturing Staff in Study Program of Dance and Music Art Education, Faculty of Literature, Universitas Negeri Malang Received his doctorate in performing arts from the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta in 2017. He is the Coordinator

of the Pascasarjan Visual Arts Teaching Study Program, State University of Malang - Indonesia, period 2018-2024. Researching and writing scientific journal articles about the performing arts, especially puppet masks. currently conducting research on performing arts with universities in Malaysia and Thailand.