



Magical Realism in Local Wisdom Majapahit *Bantengan* Show

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Abstract. This research analyzed the concept of magical realism in the *Bantengan* (Bull) Show, especially to find irreducible elements; phenomenal worlds; converging nature; unsettling doubts; and disruptions of time, space, and identity. The method used to uncover these aspects is the qualitative descriptive method. The data is achieved by observing the *Bantengan* performance via live performances, videos, and pictures. Theoretically, this research found magical realism in the data. Practically for researchers, this research is expected to broaden scientific horizons and can be used as a guideline in conducting research, especially about traditions that develop in society. For the community, this research is expected to provide an overview of the actual *Bantengan* performance and inform the public that *Bantengan* show contains the meaning of performance with magical realism value. The results of this study consist of five (5) elements that will represent the concept of magical realism value in the *Bantengan* Show. Those results include making the movements of the show harmonically matched with the music from *kendang* and *jidor*, until one inseparable element of the show called *Bantengan* trance or *ndadi* which attracts people to watch.

Keywords: Magical Realism, *Bantengan* Show, Javanese.

1 Introduction

One of the local wisdom that developed in the Majapahit era is the *Bantengan* (Bull) show. *Bantengan* is an ancestral heritage that is still developing today. This is evidenced by the existence of many groups scattered in each region of the Majapahit region. *Bantengan* is an acculturation of Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic Javanese cultures. *Bantengan* performances are disseminated by the guardians of various *surau* (mosque) using the medium of *shiar* (religious speech). This performance art contains magical elements as a medium of strength for attraction in a performance. Aljohani (2016:74) explains that the practice of depicting magical or unreal features as a natural component of an otherwise normal or ordinary world is known as magical realism [1]. Yudono (2023:8) stated that Indonesian people lived by carrying out beliefs associated with mystical or magical things [2].

The development of traditional performances that cannot adapt to the developing era will experience degradation in terms of the level of recognition in the eyes of the public and will experience extinction. Based on Supratno (1996), there are several factors caused by the extinction of performing arts, including: (1) the expansion of culture or popular arts; (2) the increasing amount of visual entertainment such as television and video; (3) performing arts are incapable of adapting to modern culture

(nothing change since the past era); (4) the community has advanced and gotten busy that it no longer has time to enjoy traditional performing arts entertainment; and (5) people rarely went to traditional performing arts because their minds work practically and sparingly [3].

By looking at the reality of technological and community culture development, attention to traditional performing arts needs to be increased. One form of preservation of traditional performing arts is through the identification and study of performing arts. Through careful identification, data will be obtained about the types of performing arts in the regions by looking at their existence. The existence of traditional performing arts will be more complete if we study elements of art and literary theory, especially about magical realism.

Magical realism is classified as a complex story because it appears inexplicable as a mixture and juxtaposition between realistic, bizarre, and fantasy (Asga, 2014, p. 15) [4]. Andalas (2018:201) also stated that magical realism really above all on unimaginary problems, a realist tone in the narrative when presenting magical events [5]. Magical realism is associated with or even said to be a version of literary realism. In other terms, magical realism in fiction writing is described as 'the blend of realism and fantasy' that makes 'extraordinary things emerge organically from habit' which extinguish the distinction between them (Faris, 2004, p. 1) [6]. Realism in literature is not about what is portrayed, but rather how it is portrayed. Realist literature, according to Watt (1987), seeks to describe a particular living environment existing in a certain time and space, which is therefore considered to be experienced and verifiable in human daily life [7].

Sundusiah (2015:123) explained that magical realism literature works attempt to demonstrate magical characteristics such as superstition, beliefs, folklore, and spiritual substance that go beyond logic into the realities of daily life [8]. Literary works of magical realism genre are literary genres that are currently very popular and representative for the development of the latest global civilization because they combine positivistic, modernist, and realistic socio-cultural and literary codes with phenomenological, premodernist, and magical social codes. As a genre that combines two cultural codes amongst positivistic, modernist, phenomenological, premodern, and magical realism [6], it provides great opportunities for people with traditional and religious-based cultures.

As a work of performance art that contains magical realism in it, *Bantengan* is one of the arts that adapts from past fairy tales. There is nothing wrong with learning from the animal world because it is a fairy tale that enters into literary works that talk about *ahlak* (personality), and is not patronizing or dogmatic. Mulia (2016:30) showed that every dead person, according to the Javanese belief, will soon become a spirit or ghost and will walk around them [9]. Hasanah (2018:316) also stated that magical realism is not intended to make the readers conceive about the show but to perceive the hidden meaning based on the events that occurred [10]. *Bantengan* was believed to be a national symbol against the tiger as a symbol of the wrath, imperialists, and capitalists of the Netherlands at that time. If in England has a royal Shakespeare company, the Netherlands has *stadsschouwburg & philharmonie haarlem*, America has the Royal

Theater, then Indonesia has a magical realism performance called *Bantengan*.

The existence of *Bantengan* performance art in community culture is inseparable from its existence in society itself. The community has recognized that *Bantengan* is one of the show's icons owned by the Majapahit community of Mojokerto.

2 Wendy B. Faris Magical Realism

Bowers (2004) divides the term into magical realism and admirable realism [11]. The origins of those phrases are a convoluted eight-decade saga with three turning events and a primary figure. The first occurred in Germany in the 1920s, the second in Central America in the 1940s, and the third period, which began in Latin America in 1955, continues internationally up to this day.

Based on Chanady (1985), three prerequisites exist for creating a narrative contains magical realism. First, there are two competing conceptions of reality, such as natural and supernatural, rational and irrational, or 'enlightened' and 'primitive'. Second, the narrator accepts both of the above views as equally valid. Third, there is no need to look for reasons or logical explanations about the authenticity of supernatural events [12].

The five main features of magical realist fiction, according to Faris (2004), are (1) the text contains irreducible magical elements, which we cannot explain using the rules of the universe as we know them; (2) the description describes the phenomenal world's tremendous presence; (3) the reader may be torn between two contradicting interpretations of events, leading to uncomfortable doubts; (4) we as a reader witness the closeness or near-union between two realms and two worlds; (5) this fictional inquiry accepts some concepts such as time, space and identity [6].

It is necessary to explore its characteristics to find out whether a work can be said to be magical realism. According to Faris (2004), magical realism has five characteristics: the irreducible elements, the phenomenal world, merging realms, the unsettling doubts, and disruptions of time, space and identity [6]. However, in this discussion, it is limited to only three characters studied. The first characteristic, the irreducible elements, contains magical events. The irreducible element is something that natural laws cannot explain as they are expressed in Western empirical speech, i.e. logic, common knowledge, or existing beliefs, as described by Young (2006) [13] and Hollaman (2004) [14]. Therefore, It is difficult for the reader to gather evidence to answer inquiries regarding the status of events and characters in a work. Something inexplicable is conveyed so casually that it feels like something (also) real. On the other hand, the magical is seen through the narrative as something ordinary, using clear, detailed, and concrete depictions. Such depictions look like grains of sand in the shells of realism (Faris, 2004, p. 9–10) [6]. The Irreducible Elements used in works of magical realism usually underscore certain issues. The issue can be traced in contexts that occur outside the literary work. In underlining the central issue, it often interferes with the logic of causation (Faris, 2004, p. 10) [6].

The second characteristic of the work of magical realism referred to by Faris (2004) is the Phenomenal World, a detailed description of the phenomenal world in the story. The distinction between fantasy and allegory is made by realism in magical

realism. Bartes (1962) claims that realism adds detail with an "effet de réel" (reality effect), which conveys the notion that the story is true without giving particular information [15]. Phenomenal world objects in the story such as sounds, things and places, can be identified in the story. To prove that these things are real, it is necessary to seek the truth about those things in the real world in order to comprehend the same meaning that occurs in daily life.

The third characteristic of magical realism is the merging of realms. The reader may sense the closeness and proximity of confluence between two worlds in this characteristic. From the point of view of cultural history, merging realms in magical realism often brings together the traditional and modern worlds. Ontologically, merging realms in magical realism brings together the magical and material worlds. In general, this narrative style can be considered a technique that mixes opposite sides of the universe, integrating parts of truth and fantasy, based on blending the phrases realism and magic in this genre. In unifying the two worlds, magical realism is seen in the space of the in-between or the space of uncertainty. Two universes are enlarged, and it is no longer a question of which is real or imaginary but of the opposite side of visible reality. By eliminating mediation between distinct realities, magical realism blurs the lines between fact and fantasy in the transfer process between two worlds.

The fourth characteristic of the work of magical realism referred to by Faris (2004) is the unsettling doubts. The unsettling doubts are those in which the reader hesitates between two contradicting concepts of events before categorizing them as irreducible elements. This difficulty is due to the many variations. Doubt can also obfuscate the irreducible element, the repercussions of which are not always obvious. The doubts experienced by contemporary Western readers often lead to conceiving the event as a dream or a hallucination of a character and conceiving it as a miracle. Scenes in magical realism may appear to be dreams, but they are not, and the text can co-opt them by categorizing them as dreams while also prohibiting such co-optation (Faris, 2004, p. 17–18) [6]. Based on Faris's explanation, there are three variations of doubt: doubt triggered by the text (ontological), doubt triggered by the objects' property, and doubt caused by readers' cultural background.

The next fifth characteristic of magical realism is the Disruption of Time, Space and Identity. This fiction, in addition to mixing several universes, challenges commonly held beliefs about time, space and identity. Time, space and identity in the modern world are disrupted because of the magical world in the real world. Despite using time and space, not all traditions, myths, legends and gothic are completely covered but leaked. The enchantment of time and space escaped into the real world's time and space. This disrupts time, space and identity in the modern world (Faris, 2004, p. 23) [6].

Overall, the five features that define magical realism fiction work illustrate how magical realism's narrative structure as a narrative technique brings together magical elements and the narrative technique of realism within itself. Through these five features, it can also be seen how relational relationships between the two, such as magical and real overlaps cause doubts, magical and real encounters in the in-between world, and disruptions result from the interaction of magical elements with the

concepts of realism. In magical realism, the position and relationship between the magical and the real and the traditional and the modern are to be aligned so that they are no longer hierarchical as in modern tendencies. Thus, a new alternative in looking at reality emerged that made magical realism have postmodern tendencies.

3 Method

The method used is descriptive qualitative; describing research data by observing the object of the Bull performance work. According to Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, qualitative research into people's lives, histories, behaviour, and the functionalization of organizations, social movements or kinship relationships can be demonstrated (p. 11) [16].

The research data source was obtained from *Bantengan* performances (live performances, video documents and performance picture documents), art actors and the public visitors with data collection techniques using observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Data analysis of this study uses the theory of magical realism which includes the irreducible elements, the phenomenal world, merging realms, the unsettling doubts, and disruptions of time, space and identity. The validity of the data in this study was obtained through triangulation of sources and methods.

4 Results & Data Analysis

4.1 The Irreducible Elements

The story of the Bull show can be concluded that the beginning comes from pencak silat which is used to protect itself from enemy attacks.

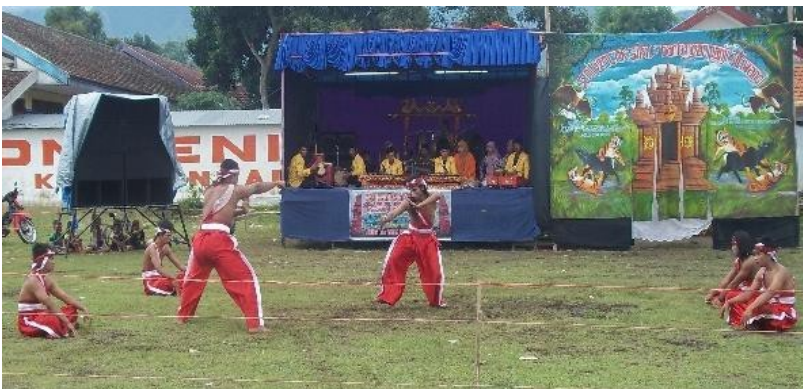


Fig. 1. Kembangan Pencak Silat Performers (photo: Panji Siliwangi Group, 2023)

Based on the picture above, it shows that performers are doing martial arts moves. In the form of presentation, the movements used are stance, step direction techniques, punch hand attacks, kick foot attacks, slams, and blocks. The steps and movements of

pesilat (performers) are in harmony with the *kendang* and *jidor* music, resulting in an interesting performance that the audience can enjoy.

4.2 The Phenomenal World

There are animal stories that have philosophical meaning. At the fugitive stage, the pedestal is the release of animal symbols, such as tigers, dragons, and birds that have a greedy character image that represents attacking and controlling activities.



Fig. 2. Fugitive Pedestal/Animal World (photo: Panji Siliwangi Group, 2023)

Based on the picture above, it can be seen that the exit of the fugitive pedestal is wild animals in the forest, such as dragons, birds, and tigers. In the form of the show, the exit of the pedestal fugitive is a harbinger of impending danger. The animal that describes the nature of being greedy is the tiger. However, along with the development of the times, other animals were added to accompany the tiger to make the show livelier. This aligns with the results of interviews conducted by researchers that fugitives have greedy personalities representing the Mongol kingdom who wanted to rule the Majapahit kingdom back then.

4.3 Merging Realms

There is a harmonious relation between the religious magical belief and Islam. Faith is an attitude of trust and wholehearted belief in God Almighty. As a man of faith, he must believe that everything that happens is by God's will.



Fig. 3. Prayer Reading Charmer (photo: Panji Siliwangi Group, 2023)

This is evidenced when the handler performs a prayer reading addressed to God Almighty. The collective user community believes and that everything happens by the will of the Power of God. Therefore, to avoid unwanted things, it begins with the reading of prayers that aim to ask for the safety and smoothness of the performers so spectators can enjoy the *Bantengan* art performance.

4.4 The Unsettling Doubts

People's beliefs are still influenced by animist culture and dynamism. This can be seen in the giving of offerings before holding a *Bantengan* performance. The offerings are prepared by the host hosting the event or responder. This aims to honour the spirits of ancestors or *dhanyang* so that they are given smoothness during the performance.



Fig. 4. Offerings (photo: Panji Siliwangi Group, 2023)

The offerings consist of several types of ingredients that have symbolism meaning, including bananas, rice, *urap-urap* (steamed and seasoned vegetables dressed with coconut), coconut, incense, traditional snacks (*klanting*, *bubur sumsum*, etc), money, and pieces of glass. If offerings are lacking or incomplete, it is believed that there will be obstacles during and after the event.

4.5 Disruptions of Time, Space and Identity

Ndadi (trance) is magical in *Bantengan*. *Ndadi* are always present and appear on the performers which become symbolic and have a certain meaning. *Ndadi* on *Bantengan* occurred in the performance arena, used as an interesting and entertaining spectacle to the public.

Bantengan and *ndadi* become one of inseparable elements of the show, it becomes a special attraction for the community. In the context of performance and ritual, *ndadi* in *Bantengan* must exist. It is done as acting with frontal scenes and *bringas* (become

rogue). This will attract public interest to watch the performance.



Fig. 5. Trace (photo: Panji Siliwangi Group, 2023)

Performers will do absurd and unbelievable things when in a state of *ndadi*. How to cure *ndadi* in *Bantengan* is usually by reciting prayers and verses from Holy Koran such as *ayat kursi* that have been mastered by the handler (*babok*). As stated by the handler (*babok*), it is believed to be able to remove the negativity in the performers' body and provide help and protection from interference and incitement of demons to be given salvation. These prayers and mantras cannot be known by anyone because there is a special knowledge that must be learned by the handler (*babok*).

5 Conclusion

In *Bantengan* performance, there is an element of magical realism which is reflected in the process of its implementation. These elements are the performance of symbols that are depicted through scenes of *pencak silat*, manifestations of animal performances, and spells that are recited during performances. The use of magical realism is unsuitable to make the reader conceive of the performance but rather to feel the events that occurred.

Author's Contributions

Author One prepared research documents/manuscripts and conducted the research. Author Two was in charge of the study direction and research manuscript completion. Author Three also conducted the research direction and guidance on completing research manuscripts.

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