

Ronggeng: Cultural Artifact and Its Representation in Indonesian Film

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Abstract. *Ronggeng* is a cultural artifact that is very popular in the life of Indonesian people, especially in Java. In a historical context, *ronggeng* which is on the concept was originally viewed as a sacred culture in its development into a profane culture. The reception of *ronggeng* is not only uttered orally, but also in literature and film. This study aims to describe *ronggeng* as a cultural artifact and its representation in the film *Nyi Ronggeng* (1969), *Darah dan Mahkota Ronggeng* (1983), and *Sang Penari* (2011). The method used in this research is descriptive analysis method representation theory of Stuart Hall, to see how the image of *ronggeng* is represented in three films. Although there are similarities, but the three films proved different levels of reception about *ronggeng*. It illustrates the development of people's thoughts on *ronggeng* that live within them. *Ronggeng* as a tradition changes according to the development of community thinking. *Ronggeng* as a cultural artifact is the manifestation of the ability of local communities to respond and adapt to the environment actively. Similarly, what is represented in the three films about *ronggeng* is a mirror of the society where the work was born.

Keywords: Indonesian film, reception, representation, *ronggeng*

INTRODUCTION

Ronggeng is a popular art in Indonesian society. This is a traditional art in the form of dances growing well in agrarian society. *Ronggeng* usually becomes a medium for farmers to hold a thanksgiving ritual for the harvest gained. Time to time, this art is not only utilized for sacred rituals, but also develops to be a profane art [1], [2].

Besides being well-known as *ronggeng*, this art is also called *gandrung*, *lengger*, *taledhek*, *tandak*, and so forth. *Ronggeng Melayu* is developing in Sumatra and *Ronggeng Betawi* is spreading in Jakarta. In Subang and Sumedang, West Java, people call it *Bangreng*. Meanwhile, in Banyuwangi, Bali, and Lombok, its famous name is *Gandrung*. *Lengger* is another name for it in Purwokerto, Wonosobo, and Magelang. While the name *taledhek*, *ledhek*, *joged*, *ronggeng*, and *tandak* are used to call female dancers in a *ronggeng* show or *tayub*

in several regions of Central Java and East Java. The last, people in West Java call them *sindhen* or *ronggeng*. This art spreads almost in all regions of Java Island [3].

Ronggeng word comes from Javanese language, which means *tandak* or female dancers accompanied by gamelan (Javanese traditional orchestra). Referring to the definition, women become the key of the art. In the *Ensiklopedi Tari Indonesia Seri P-T*, *ronggeng* is classified into couple entertainment dances performed by a woman and a man. On its shows, a female *ronggeng* dancer usually asks a male dancer by throwing her shawl to the man to go up to the stage and dance together with her [4]. Once the dance is finished, the male dancer should give her money.

Since women become the core of the dance and men are the main party to enjoy it, the negative image of *ronggeng* dancers appears. As highlighted by Soeharto and Sooi that in a society, a *ronggeng*'s life is identical with prostitutes who frequently sell themselves to the men who desire them. Although not all people think the same, but people's appraisal towards *ronggeng* particularly female dancers decreases [5], [6].

It is an unavoidable thing that the negative image of *ronggeng* is possibly affected by the fact that most of *ronggeng* dancers possess plump bodies. To be a *ronggeng* dancer, a woman should have been dancing at the age of eight (usually called *lengger*) [7], [8]. The requirements of changing a *lengger* into a *ronggeng* are frequently connected to a belief of *indhang*'s presence, a spirit possessing a *ronggeng* dancer. The myth of a *ronggeng* dancer's perfect beauty after being possessed by *indhang* indicates how a *ronggeng* dancer image is, that they should not only be plump but also beautiful. This is the reason why the procession to be a *ronggeng* dancer is considered very sacred.

This image is then depicted in a variety of literary works either spoken or written, or visual (films). Pratista mentions that films can be defined as a tool to convey various messages to people through a story as the medium. Films are not only visual media offering entertainment. More than that, films are media to transfer ideas to audiences [9]. Films are described as mass communication media as well. Like literary works, films are expressed as cultural documents representing society culture per se.

Three of the films concerning on *ronggeng* phenomenon is *Nyi Ronggeng* (1969), *Darah dan*

Mahkota Ronggeng (1983), and *Sang Penari* (2011). Therefore, the present research is intended to analyze how a *ronggeng* image is depicted in three films.

METHOD

The present research employed an analytical descriptive research method by focusing the analysis on textual analysis of *Nyi Ronggeng* (1969), *Darah dan Mahkota Ronggeng* (1983), and *Sang Penari* (2011). The representation theory from Stuart Hall was applied to read how the *ronggeng* image and its dancers were presented in the films.

Representation is viewed as an accurate illustration of a reality. Hall defines representation as a critical practice in producing cultures. The process is divided into two, which are 'mental' and 'language' representation. The 'mental' representation connects to abstract thing in mind while 'language' representation relates to a process of constructing meaning. The process is sensed as how a world is reconstructed socially to and by us in a certain meaning [10].

RESULT

Nji Ronggeng takes a popular film genre (melodrama) and uses it as a framework for the representation of a traditional folk dance and its social context. The film, set in West Java in the 1930s, draws extensively upon local folk traditions sometimes modifying or amplifying them for purposes of the plot, which centers on the rivalry between two sons of local village heads. Both seek the hand of a *ronggeng* dancer who holds a disadvantaged social position, one of the earliest feature films that are made in this color in Indonesia.

Nji Ronggeng film was directed by Alam Surawidjaya. The film was set in villages around Sumedang, West Java. It tells about Nji Sari (a *ronggeng* dancer, played by Chitra Dewi) dancing in front of a group of villagers. The dance is performed as a thanksgiving ritual for the abundant blessings of the harvest. *Ronggeng* is a form of *slametan* procession (thanks to the goddess of rice, Dewi Sri, for a successful harvest). It is told that Nji Sari is loved by Dadang (Dicky Zulkarnaen), the eldest child of *Tua Kampung Cijulang*, who wants to take the position of a *lurah*. On the other hand, Ohim (Sandy Suwardi Hassan), the eldest child of *Kampung Cigugur*, is very desperate with Sari. Moreover, he almost feels embarrassed on the *ronggeng* stage, because he does not manage to conquer Sari by holding her hair bun as required. Meanwhile, Dadang's father is angry at Dadang's relationship with Sari, because it can affect his ambition to become a *lurah*. People also do not like it, especially the news that their relationship is deliberately spread by their party opponent, *Tua Kampung Cigugur*. Dadang does not care about that. This young man is hardworking and polite. He is very different from Ohim who is boastful and fond of women. He is more curious about Sari, because Sari does not seem like an ordinary *ronggeng* that men can

easily buy, just like his friends do. The trauma of her mother, a *ronggeng*, too, who died because of being contested by men, formed Sari's attitude. The peak of the competition occurred in the people's party. In all games, Cigugur village was lost. Then, Ohim challenged others to play *ujungan*. This time, he won, until Dadang, who defeated him, came. Ohim still has not accepted it, until the bloodshed happened. Sari came to mediate and blamed those who craving for the power. The film tries to convey a message that not all *ronggeng* are the same. It intends to show Sundanese customs and arts. It also successfully brings out eroticism and sensuality of *ronggeng*.

This is in accordance with Alkema's statement that *ronggeng* dance is from shaman dance which is a dance performed by female priests to connect the inside world to the outside one, the world of ancestor spirit. Then, this dance was performed when conducting a religious ritual. *Ronggeng* is a sacrificial ritual for the fertility of agriculture. It was believed to possess magic-simpatetic power and it has influence on the ritual. By performing cleansing ritual for a village, the officers of villages invite the residents to join in dance in a field rice hoping that plants can grow well and be free from pest and any danger. Related to fertility ritual, Highwater reveals that dance may induce the miracle [11].

At the same way, Soedarsono also shows that in an agrarian culture, the fertility of the soil is farmers' only hope. They believe that the fertility of the soil cannot be gained by increasing new agricultural systems only, but it is also important to do some efforts by transforming magical power [12], [13].

Darah dan Mahkota Ronggeng is a film adapted from *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, a novel by Ahmad Tohari (1982). Directed by Yazman Yazid, the film was released on the big screen produced by Gramedia Films in 1983, one year after the novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* was first published.

The main character, Srintil (Enny Beatrice) is considered to have the blood of *ronggeng* that has not been owned by a village. The villagers earn a living from *ronggeng*. This villagers' belief was inherited from the village pioneers who lived in a barren and arid region. *Ronggeng* is considered as the life savior for both material and spiritual in the village.

After being old enough, Srintil has to undergo the main ceremony *bukak klambu*, that is giving her virginity to anyone who can pay the highest. Interestingly, whoever can give a gold bar to the *ronggeng* shaman, has the right to take Srintil's virginity. However, Srintil has already given hers to Rasus because she loves him. It is clear that Srintil's attitude was ambiguous between obeying the culture or avoiding it. Srintil consciously chooses to be a *ronggeng* as well as a prostitute for Dukuh Paruk will be empty and gloomy without *ronggeng*.

Srintil as a *ronggeng* is associated also with the soil fertility. The climax of *ronggeng* is when a woman and a man dance together called *ngibing*. Generally, nobles will have the first opportunity to *ngibing* with *ronggeng*

which is called *bedah bumi*. This ritual is translated as *bedah bumi* for the purpose of prosperity of the people in the earth. This kind of relation of *ronggeng* is believed to influence the fertility of the soul. However, *ronggeng* that has ritual function is now becoming a secular show. As shown by the requirements of being a *ronggeng* is a ritual called *bukak klambu* and after that *ronggeng* belongs to public.

The *ronggeng* in *Sang Penari* film was illustrated by figuring Surti and Srintil. Surti, played by Happy Salma, only appeared in several scenes in the opening. It is narrated that Surti passes away because of a poisonous *bongkreng tempeh* tragedy which also kills some villagers of Dukuh Paruk. Through Surti, Srintil, the character played by Prisia Nasution, is then interested in *ronggeng*.

Little Srintil once watched a *ronggeng* show in Dukuh Paruk when the *ronggeng dancer* was Surti. From her interest, Srintil became fond of dancing and singing. When she was five years old, she had shown her dancing and singing talent. Moreover, Sakarya (Srintil's grandfather), played by Landung Simatupang, assured that Srintil's talent was not just a talent, but was also possessed by *indhang*.

Growing to be a beautiful and plump girl, Srintil is pointed as a Dukuh Paruk *ronggeng* with the assistance of a *ronggeng* shaman named Kartaredja, played by Slamet Rahardjo, and his wife, Nyai Kartaredja, played by Dewi Irawan. Being a *ronggeng* was Srintil's dream since she was little. By being a *ronggeng*, she does not only pursue her dream, but also devotes herself to Dukuh Paruk and Eyang Sacamanggala, the ancestor believed by the people to protect the village.

Within a *ronggeng*'s soul, body sensuality becomes a certain pride in attracting people to come and see a *ronggeng* dance. Sensuality is emphasized by Javanese context that believes in the presence of *indhang* spirit. Its presence is trusted to be able to give more attraction power for a *ronggeng* dancer, which cannot be obtained by everybody but by a *ronggeng* dancer.

The *ronggeng* of the film was described as a beautiful woman, having a plump body and white skin. Besides the requirement of having a *ronggeng*'s aura or being possessed by *ronggeng indhang*, only good looking women can be *ronggeng* dancers.

Ronggeng is a collective possession, thus a *ronggeng* dancer belongs to a society. At this level, a *ronggeng* dancer is the goddess praised by the belief that a *ronggeng* brings beneficence. *Ronggeng* is also represented as a culture of low level people which is still close to animism and dynamism faith. At the end, the *ronggeng* art in the film leaves its cult, and just becomes the profane art which time to time is then left behind.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion, it can be drawn a conclusion that a *ronggeng* has particular beauty and sacred values. *Ronggeng* was considered as a sacred ritual and it

becomes a profane art performance as represented in Indonesian films. *Ronggeng* or *tayub* as a cultural artifact in other regions may have different forms and values. It will be based on the ability of society adapting it to its environment. What has been represented in Indonesian films is the reflection of society's reception where the art work is produced.

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