

The Meaning of Films for Acehnese

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Abstract—Films in Aceh didn't seem to have any future ahead, especially after the armed conflict and the values and norms that were applied in Aceh. Most people in Aceh viewed films negatively because it was considered to have a negative influence towards the people and would also jeopardize the Islamic culture. Even cinemas were thought to be a place to do immoral things. Those statements made people in the film industry reluctant to build the business there. But after the great tsunami hit Aceh in 2004, documentary films arose. First, it was to inform the nation about the tsunami and its victims, but then it blossomed well throughout the years. This research is to describe the meanings of films for Aceh society, despite on its culture and its history. Data were collected based on qualitative research with a descriptive method. Data collection techniques are observation, depth interview, and documentation study. This research was conducted in Aceh, April 2018. Research result shows that there were two meanings of films for the people of Aceh, they are (1) as a 'reflection', which was shown in documentary films, and (2) as an 'entertainment', which was shown in comedy genre films.

Keywords—*acehnese; indie; documentary; comedy; films*

I. INTRODUCTION

Films in Aceh had undergone peaks and valleys, whether it was because of its values and norms that were applied in Aceh or because of the many problems that Aceh had encountered over the years. There were reports that the film industry in Aceh couldn't reach a higher goal because of its traditions, moreover the cinemas. Some people of Aceh were afraid that cinemas would be a place for people to do immoral things, this is because of the Shari'a law that formulates in Aceh which seemed to make cinemas impossible to stand. Cinemas were viewed negatively by the people there. Cinemas in Aceh also seemed to not have a future ahead since the area was hit by the armed conflict. And the peak of all this was when the tsunami hit that swept away the surviving theaters.

Naturally, cinemas in Aceh were made to be shut down mainly because of the conflict, the tsunami tragedy, and business factors. The tsunami tragedy was marked everywhere after ten years. A sculpture of a giant wave marks Lambaro, one of four mass grave sites, where 46,000 bodies are buried. A hotel front desk displays a photo of smashed boats filling its parking lot. The dome from a mosque 1½ km away rests in an emerald-green rice field. Those are memories of the great tsunami that hit Aceh in 2004 which until today still become a scar that lies in the heart of Acehnese people [1].

Though, on the other hand, while cinemas were shut down, documentary films about Aceh started to develop after the Tsunami tragedy. It so happened that people around the world sought more information about the great Tsunami, Aceh and the victims of the Tsunami. Since then, people around the world also had more tendency to know more about Aceh, its people, and its culture. Aceh itself is located in the northern part of Sumatra Island and is the most western region of the archipelago region. Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam is at the gate entrance to the western part of Indonesia. Almost all Acehnese are Muslims. In addition, Aceh is also famous as the first region of the emergence of Islam in Southeast Asia.

Since the peak of documentary films about Aceh then '*Aceh Documentary*' (A-Doc) was built. A-Doc is a center for documentary education and film production development. It has contributed to the national documentary film industry and taken an active role in international documentary forums. For example, Aceh Documentary voiced the idea by holding a movie together, playing the Night Bus movie which won the national award [2]. It is clear that films have a necessary role in the society and also the country.

Film as a medium of mass communication plays an important role. Film is an audiovisual communication media to convey a message to a group of people who come gather in a certain place [3]. Films can have a tremendous influence on the human psyche (audience). In a process of watching a film, there is a phenomenon called social psychology as the identification of psychology [4]. Those statements about films proved out to be aligned as what reaction the audience did after they watch Aceh documentary films about the great tsunami that hit Aceh in 2004. It made people all around the world come together and help out the victims.

Films, as mentioned above, have important roles in society, but at the same time films can be against a culture where the society sees it with one eye. This is exactly what Aceh people are experiencing. In one hand most people in Aceh thinks that films have a negative role for the society, but on the other hand, films in Aceh have emerged especially after documentary films about Aceh spread all over the country. For that, the research focus based on the background as stated above is "*What do films mean for the people in Aceh?*", this research focus will also describe what kind of films that the people of Aceh tend to watch.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this article is a qualitative research method using descriptive-qualitative design. Descriptive research describes a situation or an event. This study does not seek or explain the relationship between two variables, it does not test the hypothesis or make predictions [5]. The research concentrates on a particular unit of various phenomena [6].

Data are collected by the writers by going to the field and collect information through interviews and also observations, which is why the researcher has a role as the main instrument. Besides interviews and observations, the writers also collect pieces of information from the literature study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Aceh which is one of the cities at the western tip of Indonesia is known for its consistency in the religion of Islam so it is well-known as the 'hall of mecca'. This profound name has become an icon throughout the country which settled out Islamic values among the people there. In addition to the highly upheld Islam religion, Aceh is also known for its long history of political conflict in the 20th century. The Acehnese independence movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* was also known as GAM), despite its reconciliation, remains as a wound for the people of Aceh. Unresolved recovery of the political conflict, the 2004 tsunami again incised more injuries for the people of Aceh [7].

The tsunami tragedy led many people around the world to witness with their own eyes the destruction of what had occurred. Many documentary films had been made and also had been distributed around the world. People from every corner of the world had access to watch these documentary films through *youtube*. Films became a media for Aceh not only to give information to the world but also to get some information from the world including how to survive and thrive back after a tragic event.

"Post-tsunami Acehnese films developed from the arrival of humanitarian foundations from around the world that often made documentaries about social life in post-tsunami Aceh. The NGO then invited Acehnese youth to produce films together. For this reason, most indie films produced in Aceh are documentaries." (Ayi, 2018)

As what Ayi had stated above, documentary films emerged after the tsunami tragedy. Documentary films, which mostly were indie films were produced highly because of the demands. People across the nation and global were curious about the great tsunami and its victims. Indie films itself is a modern cultural term that stems from the word "independent." Originally, the defining quality of indie media (film, music, publishing, etc.) was that it was produced outside of the traditional systems of production. So in the film, for example, movies produced without the support of the major 'Hollywood' studios would be "independent films," or "indies" for short [8].

"Documentary films in Aceh also act as an advocacy media with the government. For the Aceh government itself, the film serves as a medium of socialization and/or information media. The media information here means that

the government can find out what issues are developing in the community through documentaries produced by Aceh-based filmmakers. The film is also used as a media criticism of the government and the realities that occurred in Aceh" (Ayi, 2018).

As stated above, documentary films have become a media for the government to seek information about what issues are developing in the society. This makes documentary films in Aceh a significant role in the society. Jamal stated "*A-Doc was formed from the conversation of the students of Acehnese immigrants in Malang in 2010. At that time, they planned a documentary production about the children of conflict victims in Aceh. Formally formed in 2013, and a year after it has been in the form of a foundation."*

Though, besides documentary films, indie comedy films are also familiar among the people of Aceh. It seems that these type of indie films have become their entertainment. The demand for these type of films is very high. Researchers presumed that this tendency is a result of the so many misfortuned things that had happened in Aceh, so these type of indie films become a get an away, a break from all the problems they face in their life. This statement was also claimed by some informants.

"The most popular commercial indie film genre in Aceh is the comedy. Comedy genre is in demand and demanded by the people of Aceh because the people of Aceh are in need of entertainment. This entertainment is needed after the protracted conflicts in Aceh, as well as the people of Aceh still have wounds caused by the tsunami that occurred in 2004" (Ayi, 2018)

From the statement about, it is clear that most people in Aceh have a big desire on entertainment, they seemed to have enough of all the conflicts surrounding them whether it was because of their conflict politic history or conflicts related to values and norms applied in Aceh. Ghazali also stated that indie films related to comedy have a high demand and have a significant role to mend the wounds for Acehnese people. He stated that these type of genre films developed rapidly after the tsunami tragedy.

"Commercial indie films in Aceh have blossomed since the 2000s with various film genres. After Aceh was hit by the tsunami, the comedy genre became the most popular genre in the Aceh market. The genres of films produced include comedy, religion, and action genre" (Ghazali, 2018)

The uprise of comedy films in Aceh was marked by a comedy film named '*Empang Breuh*', which is a VCD-style comedy-drama series in Aceh. The setting is very natural. The theme is about romance and daily life. The language that was used in this comedy film was the local language, Aceh. The first VCD of this film was premiered in August 2006 and was sold 25 thousand copies. The second episode sold out 40 thousand copies, while the third episode sold out 70 thousand copies. The fourth episode even sold up to 100 thousand copies, followed by the fifth episode that has been purchased as many as 90 thousand copies. Soon the sixth episode will be launched [9].

“The most popular commercial comedy genre film in Aceh is ‘Empang Breuh’. This year has entered the 13th season. There are also films played by local singers as well as Acehnese actors, namely ‘Bergek’ who gained good attention in Aceh society” (Ghazali, 2018)

Ghazali (2018) agreed that the comedy film series has become some sort of a diversion for the people in Aceh. “Commercial comedy genre movies are entertainment for the people of Aceh; serves also as a means of "relief" in the midst of the conflict that often occurs in Aceh, the characteristic of Aceh comedy film is the plaque of Acehnese folklore”. Folklore is stories that come out from the people, the daily life.

Film itself for the people of Aceh has a significant role, as said by Ayi (2018), “*movies are a self-reflective media. This means that everything that one has done throughout one’s life is seen in a film*”. The people of Aceh believes that when we are about to die, they shall watch a motion picture from the minute they were born until the moment before they die. This assumes that a movie is somehow a note of life. Documentary films are the result of their understanding of what a film should be because a documentary film is a film that documents the real-life story.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, there are two kinds of films that are very popular among the people in Aceh, they are documentary films and comedy films. The meaning of films for Acehnese is aligned with the two kinds of films that grow in Aceh.

- As a ‘reflection’, which is shown in documentary films. Documentary films for the people are like looking back on what they have experienced in their life.
- As an entertainment, which is shown in comedy genre films. Entertainment films shown in comedy films are

some sort of a relief for the people in Aceh. Comedy films become a diversion for all the problems that they faced in their daily life.

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