

Wayang Godhonk: The Transgressive Resistance in Fine Art

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ABSTRACT

The controversy surrounding the subject of tobacco is a phenomenal issue that has become the topic of major discourse worldwide and had a huge impact on the entire Indonesian society. Various forms of resistance have appeared, from local farmers, organizers, members of the elite community and even government officials, indicating that the social and political unrest taking place has not resulted in any common ground that has the ability to produce a solution to the problem. Nevertheless, the tobacco community continues to show resistance in various forms. The art composition entitled “Wayang Godhonk” is presented here as an alternative art form which invites people to remember once again the true essence of living creatures in this universe. In the past, tobacco leaves have been viewed merely as a commodity, not as a living being with energy or power. Since the emergence of an industrial culture, man has always failed to negotiate with nature and the environment. Man has become a ghostly figure that preys on other living creatures on this earth. For this reason, “Wayang Godhonk” appears as a form of art that has the ability to raise people’s awareness and to purify the spiritualism of mankind towards all other living creatures.

Keywords: Farmers’ resistance, transgression, fine art, tobacco

INTRODUCTION

Ethnographical Background

A massive anti-cigarette movement has appeared recently in Indonesia, and has rapidly and in a well-organized fashion managed to influence the economic chain of the cigarette industry, with the effect of marginalizing the historical and cultural cigarette community and also tobacco crops in Indonesia. The world health organizations that have instigated this control of tobacco and cigarettes have worked their way into a local and regional level in order to carry out their mission of saving the global community from the danger of cigarette smoke.

Through national and governmental intervention, the existence of tobacco farmers is becoming threatened by cases of propaganda that prohibits or forbids cigarettes, and also by new laws, designed to abolish tobacco plantations, that have become a hot topic in this country. Local communities that feel disturbed by these developments have begun to show resistance by forming communities to organize and unite forces in the form of actions of solidarity and large-scale protests and demonstrations that have attracted the attention of the public.

Government Regulation number 109/2012 concerns the safety of materials containing addictive substances in the form of tobacco products for people’s health. The draft of a statement by the “Community for the Defence of Clove Cigarettes” describes this Government regulation as an extension of Law number 36/2009 about health, specifically clause 116, which emphasizes the importance of a government regulation concerning the safety of materials containing addictive substances in the form of tobacco products for people’s health. Through this Government Regulation, the government wishes to limit the

consumption of products which contain addictive substances from tobacco, whereas in fact what this same Government Regulation does is to harm the national tobacco trade system and also the local tobacco industry. One of the points in the Government Regulation that is believed to be harmful to the tobacco industry is the regulating or standardization of the level of tar and nicotine content in all cigarettes. This opens up the way for competition between local tobacco products and Virginian tobacco from outside, with its lower tar content, and creates opportunities for importing tobacco from abroad. This of course is a threat to national tobacco products such as clove cigarettes.

The proposed bill about the abolition of tobacco crops not only threatens the livelihood of tobacco farmers themselves but is also a cause for national concern. The over-exaggerated health mission is also a cover for foreign capitalist organizations to take over the powerful national industry of clove cigarettes. The content of the Government Regulation which was intended to regulate health matters instead regulates business and agricultural systems such as packaging, standardization of tobacco, trade systems, product diversification, and promotional or advertising activities.

The tobacco farmers in Temanggung have taken various steps as a reaction to the threats that are affecting their livelihood as a result of the new proposed tobacco bills. Campaigns by international anti-tobacco and anti-cigarette movements led by developed countries, world organizations such as WHO, central and local government bodies, the religious organization Muhammadiyah, NGOs, MUI, and various other institutions have sparked the fury of thousands of farmers in the central tobacco producing district of Temanggung. They have proclaimed their opposition with various demonstrations and other action. In their opinion, the new regulations in no way support the tobacco farmers themselves but rather support various business concerns and capitalism.

One indication that social change is about to take place in a society, as a result of the implementation of formal regulations about the control of tobacco crops, is the emergence of various forms of resistance from those who feel they are being disadvantaged by the new regulations. Huge negative consequences have been felt by the tobacco farmers who are the main producers in the production chain of cigarettes. Attitudes and actions showing their opposition have appeared in various forms of their day to day activities as a response to the unrest they are experiencing. This was felt clearly in 2013 when the Lamuk community presented a performance of the traditional art form *Ketoprak* by local tobacco farmers, with the story "*Banteng Gugat*". In this kind of art performance, the farmers, who are ordinary members of the community, can play various roles, such as kings, governors, religious leaders, giants, soldiers, or ordinary people. The story presented on this occasion told of the farmers' anxiety resulting from the current issues concerning the tobacco industry. The expression of their anxiety, protests, criticism, and anger was included in the storyline and also in the humorous interludes. This tradition, which has been passed down from generation to generation and continues to exist today, provides a place for expression for members of the lower class of society.

The traditional folk art of the people from this mountainous region is used as a medium for communication which brings together the community and strengthens their sense of unity, not only in their work, family activities, and efforts to earn a daily living, but also through art activities which can fulfil their spiritual needs. Performances of *ketoprak* are not only a form of entertainment but also act as a medium for channelling the voices and ideas of the tobacco farming community. The expression of their thoughts and opinions is usually presented in the form of humour, as a hidden criticism or expression of their disappointment, and although their criticism is not heard by those in power, it is important for them to have a way to

channel their thoughts and feelings. Expressions of criticism are presented using their own style of language, through dialogue or body language and using satire and symbolism.

The farming community, which geographically is located far from the national centre of power, is nevertheless coloured by a political dynamic. Through community organizations, the people develop the strength to form communities of tobacco farmers and carry out their political actions which include lobbying the government in order to make their aspirations known. They use various ways to try and save the tobacco industry from the foreign hegemony that has a monopoly of power. The farmers, who previously responded only in symbolic ways, are now moved to display their open and organized opposition. For this reason, this ethnographical study about the resistance of tobacco farmers aims to act as an “art ground” which will provide a better cultural understanding and build a new concept in the creation of an art composition.

This ethnographical study attempts to understand how the tobacco farming community has developed various forms of resistance, in both symbolic and open ways. It is hoped that the stories of their struggle to preserve their tobacco crops from global control will help artists to interpret the problems that the farmers face in a more concrete manner.

FOUNDATION FOR COMPOSITION

Taking as a starting point the research about the tobacco farming community on the slopes of Mount Sumbing, the choice of method for an art composition also has the ability to create a different impact on the interpretation of the context and events which form a work of art. According to P.M. Laksono, the context of art in today’s global era cannot be separated from its connection with a highly complex global chain that is full of friction (Tsing, 2005). As explained by Ted Lewellen (2002:7-8), globalization can be defined broadly as an increase in the flow of trade, money, culture, ideas, and people as a result of sophisticated technology in the field of communication and the journey of the spread of neoliberal capitalism to all corners of the world, as well as the local and regional adaptation and opposition to these currents (Laksono, 2007:1-2).

This study concerns the controversy surrounding the tobacco industry in Indonesia, in particular the problems faced by the tobacco farming community on the slopes of Mount Sumbing, and specifically related to the interconnection of globalization which is full of friction, as explained above. The social and economic chain stretching from top to bottom involves many people and as such, it affects the highly complex local-global dynamic.

Therefore, in understanding such a context of art, P.M. Laksono offers the use of methodology of the art of hermeneutics which emphasizes the ontological problem of understanding (the process of becoming) in order to further enrich the wealth of existing art forms with its reflective efforts, since the context of interpretation is closely bound by time and space, which means that this interpretation is discursive/dialectic towards other interpretations. This qualitative reflective research also demands that the artist become an interpreter in order to be present in the social event involving the subjects who are being observed (Laksono, 2007:5).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a study in the field of art composition. The methodology used is ontological hermeneutic. Laksono (2007) states that the product of processes in a minimal area or on the threshold of an area (a particular community), is where social movements, popular democracy, similarity, totality, power of the people, and all kinds of opposition lie. Hence,

visuality has a social context which contains a particular meaning and involves the subjective experience of a person in his encounter with the community.

A hermeneutic research methodology as an epistemology (with realist pretensions) endeavours to understand the objectivity of a person's thoughts that are found in art, language, institutions, and religions. An assumption of the above conception is usually used in a study of structuralism which disregards the existence of the proponents of the culture being investigated in the process of interpretation (Laksono, 2007).

The data in this research is in the form of the symbols found in a performance of Wayang Godhonk. The research sources include informants, documentation, and performances of Wayang Godhonk itself. Soedarso (2006) explains that the composition of a work of art is essentially an art, which may be in the form of a concept, the action of execution of that concept, or its result. The technique used for analysing the data was interactive analysis. This involves the researcher working among the components for the reduction of data, presentation of data, and verification of the study (Huberman, 1988).

Creation of "Wayang Godhonk"

The art of composition, as based on the observation of the study in the field, underlies the construction of the artist's imagination about the problem of tobacco. Based on an ethnographical experience during my time spent with the tobacco farmers, as an artist I felt the need to create a concept which reinforces the concern and attitude of the artist, based on the experience and findings while defending the interests of the tobacco farmer. Therefore, the concept of the work of art on which this study about tobacco farmers focuses is that of transgressive resistance. The works resulting from this study show the process of exploration of ideas that brought the artist to a level of self-sublimation which truly represents the ideas, thoughts, and character of the artist's personal identity in the main work, "Wayang Godhonk".

James Scoot states that the farmers who do not possess great potential to resist apparently have the ability to carry out actions of resistance and opposition that are effective for themselves through their day to day resistance. The resistance is usually on a small scale and carried out individually. The appearance of the phenomenon of banditry as a form of social protest of the farmers is also manifested in the form of misappropriation. This misappropriation is considered to be a disturbance to the safety of the village, and in particular the plantations or farmland. According to Hoftman (Sudibyo, 2001), banditry aims to eradicate injustice, repression, exploitation, resistance to poverty, pressure of taxes, forced labour, and social and political pressure.

As stated by Scoot (1986), resistance may be in any form and appear in different ways. Efforts to show resistance may be seen in the form of obstacles, pretence, compliance, pick-pocketing, arson, sabotage, and so on. Resistance is revealed in disguised actions, not openly, anonymously, and non-confrontationally. As an example, one form of resistance of the lower classes can be found in the art of *dagelan* or traditional comedy (Budiarto, 2005). They use humour, rumours, and gossip to express their resistance and criticism. In this case, art becomes a medium for resistance.

Scoot (1990) also states that works of art have two functions. To the ruling class, a work of art is a tool to dominate the lower classes. They use public transcripts, or language with denotative meaning that can be understood by all classes of society, to convey their ideas and influence others. To the repressed lower class, a work of art is a tool to convey criticism and resistance to the dominance of the ruling class. They use hidden transcripts, or symbolic connotative language which is only understood by members of their own group in order to

express their criticisms and resistance to the upper and ruling classes. They usually use humour, issues, gossip, songs, and folklore to express their criticisms.

In this global era, with the advances in information technology and transformation, barriers between nations that are formed by distance and time are no longer an obstacle for the exchange of information. These conditions enable a struggle for influence between one country and another. Hence, this battle of ideology indicates that hegemony is becoming a tool to influence and control others. The case of the tobacco industry that has been around for some time, with its various complex issues, is a battle for hegemony between different sides. The intervention of foreign organizations in national concerns appears to be continuing up to the point where related government bodies as well as autonomous organizations are joining in to support the anti-tobacco movement. In a similar fashion, the farmers and other pro-tobacco groups are carrying out a kind of counter-hegemony in order to oppose the existing hegemony.

As a result of this battle, or competitive discourse, the farmer is in fact becoming the victim of the hegemony of those in power who have their own interests and concerns. This is evident if we look at the history of tobacco, which originated from the American continent and was an export commodity during Dutch colonial times (Padmo & Djatmiko, 1991). Farmers were obliged to plant tobacco under a forced labour system. The tobacco crop, which was originally for the consumption of the elite, gradually became more popular until it became a product that was consumed by the general public. However, after Indonesian tobacco took control of the world market in the export of tobacco, this reality was turned upside down by shutting down the local Indonesian tobacco market. State domination, through the implementation of new tobacco bills, undeniably provoked a response from the tobacco community who had for a long time been practicing their culture with the presence of the tobacco crop.

In general, transgression refers to a discursive action which oversteps or violates boundaries. As Foucault explains, transgression itself reinforces existing regulations/systems rather than destroying these regulations or boundaries. In other words, transgression redefines boundaries of separation and gives new meaning to matters of identity and social practices (Foust, 2010:3).

Taussig (2006) adds that transgression is an action of overstepping boundaries which is strategically possible and has the ability to create a new room for thought, as a result of the opening up of these boundaries. Foust (2010) states further that transgression is an action of resistance which opposes dominant powers in a hierarchical position, such as government bodies, elite groups, or the wealthy classes. Transgression becomes a way to interpret a world which has the ability to challenge or push aside these dominant powers. In this case, transgression is an attitude which tests an established system or structure in order to create a new form that is more creative and more critical.

Social transgression is the movement outside a structure or the resistance to a structure (a system/regulation) which is not merely for purposes of social justice but also to reinforce identity. In the concept of transgression, a phenomenon of deviation occurs as a reminder that there are regulations to be opposed. Therefore, the behaviour of transgression usually uses the rhetoric of overstepping cultural boundaries. In another sense, as outlined by Chris Jenk (2003), transgression attempts to step outside our cultural boundaries in order to create a shared dialogue, not simply by translating what other people say but by becoming a creative action and ethical politics.

Through a debate of the arguments described by Foucault, he states that transgression is a mode of resistance, by understanding it as an alternative to actions of hegemony, and has become highly significant for building a better understanding of theories of hegemony and social change. As a new way of showing a political stance and a general outlook to life, transgression opens up a new analysis for interpreting resistance, in particular for studies about events of deviation (anarchism, criminal acts, sexual abnormalities, carnivals, rituals, juvenile delinquency, and so on).

Inspired by the problems of the tobacco farming community, this study views the phenomenon of the various forms of resistance to the anti-tobacco movement led by those in power, through a change in the regulations controlling tobacco crops, which leads this research in the direction of a study about the transgressive resistance of the tobacco farming community. Wayang Godhonk invites everyone to return to the true nature of the leaf as a living being, the role of which deserves appreciation in our lives as a society and as a nation (Margono, 2014), rather than viewing tobacco simply as a trade commodity with economic value. In this way, economic and political interests surrounding this product will not have control over our human spirit. From this contemplative way of thought, we can see that a leaf possesses a philosophical power for the continuity of nature and human life in this world. Based on this philosophy, Gus Pur's "Wayang Godhonk" uses leaves as the main element in his performance.

Wayang Godhonk was created as a transgressive form, with the mischief of an artist who is not a puppet master, or *dalang*, in his true identity but rather an artist who performs puppet plays or plays with puppets. In addition, Wayang Godhonk is not designed to present life lessons or norms that should be adhered to but rather presents an example of mischief that can become an alternative way to creating a reflective and contemplative space that involves the audience.

This art performance of "Wayang Godhonk" was the result of an artistic and creative process based on the concept of transgressive resistance. In the context of the artist's involvement in or concern for the tobacco problem in Indonesia, the artist felt the need to become involved in a social movement to provide a medium of communication for the voice of resistance of the people. This form of art performance is not only the culmination of a creative art process but will also continue to be developed to become a reflective performing art form by including various kinds of discursive discourse in the performance. In this way, the artist will continue to carry out a process of communication within the social change of a community through transgressive means.

The performance of Wayang Godhonk, which is a form of shamanic art, was chosen by the artist as a new form of ritual by including ritual elements related to the communication between man and nature. These elements include offerings, incantations, and so on. This ritual medium can also be seen as a medium for spiritual healing through the communication between the artist and the audience. In the understanding of the local community, the role of a shaman is to provide balance in times of chaos.

As a visual transgressive art, this performance takes the form of a happening art in which the performance presents things that are different from a typical *wayang* performance. Wayang Godhonk can be seen as an attempt to open up discursive space for the problem that is taking place. In this way, the performance of Wayang Godhonk appears at a time when people's spiritual circumstances are surrounded by concern, grief, and contemplation, rather than celebration.

Performances of “Wayang Godhonk”

Performances of Wayang Godhonk have been given at various events in the endeavour to enrich the existing wealth of performing arts and to socialize this particular art form.



Picture 1. A performance of Wayang Godhonk at the Pengayoman Paviliun in Temanggung at a book discussion about Giharu’s novel “Trilogi Kehidupan Sederhana”, 13 May 2014.

FINAL NOTE

The process of creating a work of art is not simply to produce an object with artistic value. A work of art is hoped to become a medium of communication due to its flexible nature and because culturally it can be understood in different ways. A work of art can become a medium of social visibility, not simply an artefact that deserves to be appreciated, and must become a part of a cultural movement in order to create social change in a better direction, in a unique and distinct way.

A work of art becomes more meaningful when the artist himself becomes sublime with the work he has created, by involving himself totally in the concerns of the problem addressed. The subjective experiences of the artist in relation to the problems of the tobacco farmers on Mount Sumbing subsequently form the artist’s attitude to align with the farmers in the problem they are facing. The artist participates actively in forming the history of the movement of a nation, like the people themselves. This ethnographical study about the creation of a work of art enables this achievement to be applied in a scholarly nature and accounted for academically.

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