

REPRESENTATION OF POPULAR CULTURE IN THE ELECTRONIC CINEMA (REFREED TO AS *SINETRON*) *SITTI NURBAYA* SHOWN BY THE TVRI AND THE TRANS TV

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ABSTRACT

The *Sitti Nurbaya* research on the TV-series' form is due to under consideration that, this show is to be very fond of Indonesian society. The TVRI and Trans TV-version of *Sitti Nurbaya*'s TV-series happened to provoke a polemic in mass media. The director and the producer of this series obtained compliments and scorn, even just in order to be challenged by a group of audience. Another audience threatened in order to stop the *Sitti Nurbaya* series show because it is considered to be able to bring down the Minangkabau people's prestige. The problem of the research is how the *Sitti Nurbaya*'s novel and TV-series audiovisual text structure are? flow does the critics' perspective watch the TVRI and Trans TV-version of *Sitti Nurbaya*'s series? What kind of ideology does support the show of TVRI and Trans TV-version of *Sitti Nurbaya*'s series?

The theory which is used in this research is popular culture, ideology, inter-text and perception theories. This kind of studies model refers to the opinion which stated that the cultural is always political and popular culture becomes a hegemony and ideology.

The destructive sign system transposition such as, distortion and deconstruction, in large of number can be found in *Sitti Nurbaya*'s TV-series' Trans TV show. This text destruction covers plot, background, character and also the extrinsic aspects. The form which is evaluated as the appreciative part is, the story is returned to its context.

The television media capitalism strength adapted - *Sitti Nurbaya*'s novel as literature text - into TV-series form through text transposition i.e. crossing, destructing, erasing, humiliating, and protesting reference text politically. That thing as postmodern cultural phenomenon because the cultural studies creators evaluate modern cultural has failed, because gives high cultural more attention and neglects low cultural which is identical with the popular culture. The difference on that show version can not let go of from the hegemony or media power. TVRI station is the only station in Indonesia, belongs to the government while Trans TV belongs to the private.

Keywords: representation, cultural popular, novel, electronica sinema

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Sitti Nurbaya* written by Marah Rusli is classified as a highly quality literary work and attracts the cultural popular doer. It was adapted into a film in 1941 and several electric cinemas. One of the film directors who adapted it into an electric cinema

is Dedi Setiadi. The scenario was written by Asrul Sani. It was shown by the Central TVRI Station Jakarta every Saturday night on 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th September 1991.

Then it was adapted into another electric cinema again by Encep Masuki, another film director and was produced by MD Entertainment. The new version did not change the title. In other words, the title was still *Sitti Nurbaya* but it was shown by the Trans TV on 10th, 17th, 24th and 31st December 2004. It was an export commodity as it was shown by the Malaysian TV3 Station on 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th October 2008. It was also shown by the TPI Station but the version was written by Rizal Putra Sirait and the scenario was written by Siswanto. It was shown on 28th August 2009; however, it was shown in the form of a parody comedy.

The novel *Sitti Nurbaya* was adapted into several versions of electronic cinema which turned out to result in dissatisfaction and many protests from the onlookers. The novel *Sitti Nurbaya* written by Marah Rusli was firstly published in 1922 and was so famous that by 2008 it had been published 48 times. *Sitti Nurbaya* has been such an interesting story that it is still interesting to be explored. The novel has been explored using various theories. However, to the writer's knowledge, nobody has analyzed it from the perspective of popular culture shown on the television media as struggled for by the designer of cultural studies based at the University of Birmingham, England.

The other reason is that both the version shown by the TVRI and that shown by the Trans TV gave rise to polemics on the mass media. It has been legendary and monumental to the Indonesian plural community. This classical story reveals a highly complex life problem and is related to colonial politics, Minang tradition and culture, local genius and feminine struggle which is highly relevant to be discussed within the current context.

Based on what has been discussed above, the problems in this study are formulated as follows: what the visual audio textual structures of the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* shown by the TVRI and the Trans TV are like; what critical insights are provided by the onlookers into the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* shown by the TVR and the Trans TV; and what ideologies the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* shown by the TVRI and the Trans TV contain in the perspective of popular cultural studies?

As far as the library research done by the writer is concerned, no research in the representation of popular culture shown in the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* has been conducted. However, the research in electronic cinema has been done by Yayasan Pengembangan Media Anak (YPMA) entitled "Potret Sinetron Remaja 2006-2007",

Budianta (2004) concerning “Representasi Kaum Pinggiran dan Kapitalisme dalam novel *Cerita Boejang Bingoeng* dan novel *Si Doel Anak Betawi* dengan *Si Doel Anak Modern* dan Sinetron *Si Doel Anak Sekolah* Tayangan RCTI”, and Sarjono (1996) entitled “Dari Karya Sastra *Salah Asuhan* ke Sinetron *Salah Asuhan* Tayangan SCTV.”

The three studies above focused on the analysis of electronic cinema texts and excluded what the onlooker’s insights were like and the ideology of the media showing it. As apposed to the approaches adopted in the studies above, the current study investigates the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* from the perspective of popular culture as electronic cinema is the product of popular culture. In addition, in cultural studies, the popular culture is frequently neglected and less attention is paid to it. However, in the dimension of cultural studies, popular culture is an essential object and is used as the domain in which the founder struggles in the western parts of the world.

The theories employed to analyze the problems above are the theory of popular culture (John Storey, Stuart Hall), the theory of Ideology (Louis Althaser), the theory of Intertext (Riffatte) and the theory of Reception (Derrida, Foucult).

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted in Denpasar; however, the library research was conducted through the H.B. Jassin Literary Documentation Center Jakarta and the Literary Division of the Language Center Jakarta. The data obtained were continued by field research which was conducted in Jakarta and Denpasar. In Jakarta, Putu Wijaya, as a cultural observer, a scenario writer and a film director, Hilmy Adryanto, the Marketing Public Relations of the Trans TV Jakarta, and Taufik Ismail, the man of letters, were interviewed.

The primary data were obtained from the audiovisual texts of the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* and the secondary data were obtained from books, newspapers, magazines and informants. The audiovisual texts were in the forms of words and pictures of the version shown by the TVRI and that shown by the Trans TV. As the time when both versions were shown was over, the data were also obtained from the DVD cassettes of the version shown by the TVRI and the VCD cassettes of the version shown by the Trans TV. In addition, the researcher was also an active onlooker of the two versions and their repeated presentations.

The data needed in this study were collected using the techniques of observation, interview and documentation. Observation refers to observing the object under study

intensively by reading, observing and listening to it. In this study the reading technique was continued by taking notes of the novel *Sitti Nurbaya* written by Marah Rusli published by Balai Pustaka in 2008. The observing and listening techniques (audio visual) were done by watching the version shown by the TVRI and that shown by the Trans TV through their DVD cassettes and VCD cassettes. The data successfully collected were analyzed using Miles and Huberman model. According to them, the technique of analysis covers data reduction, data presentation and conclusion withdrawal.

RESULTS

Representation of Popular Culture in the Electric Cinema Texts

According to Kristeva (Pilliang, 1999: 123), a text or a literary work is a space where quotations crisscross. A reader or an onlooker also refers to a space where quotations intersect. Intertextuality refers to the space where one system of sign crosses to another system of sign termed as transposition which covers distortion, deconstruction and appreciation.

In the version shown by the Trans TV much distortion and deconstruction as the damaging transposition were observed to take place. The internal elements which included the plot, the setting and the characterization as well as the external ones were distorted and deconstructed. In the conflicts taking place in the elements of the plot, in spite of being conventional, there were so many intrigues that they became illogical. The onlookers were made curious; however, the intrigues made by the characters were so many that the onlookers became bored. On one hand, the intrigues might be interesting; on the other hand, they bored the onlookers.

What was evaluated to be appreciation was that the story was brought back to the context. Samsulbahri and Sitti Nurbaya were made to meet again in another world. They were narrated to get married and to wear specific Minang gown. However, in the previous four episodes, no character appeared with traditional Minang gown. Finally, such an appreciation which was intended to remind the onlookers of the high quality novel *Sitti Nurbaya* did not greatly enhance the quality of the electric cinema. In fact, it lowered the quality as it distorted the text and what was intended was not clear. This can be categorized as an expression of postmodern art.

The inconsistent textual crossing was also found in what was done by the character Datuk Maringgih. Although the setting was made modern by his executive appearance, he turned out to have dialogues in Minang dialect. This was maintained to

raise his image as the character that appeared brightly in the version shown by the TVRI. The concept of transposition such as deconstruction, distortion and appreciation in the textual crossing was represented by the character Datuk Maringgih in the version shown by the Trans TV. He might be stated to damage, delete, criticize, preserve and to remind of the referent text.

The Critical Public Study of Electric Cinema

The critical public study reveals the attitudes of the onlookers toward and their insights into the electric cinema *Sitti Nurbaya*. How they understood the messages and how the meaning was formed based on the messages consumed by the media. The public insights were obtained from the mass media such as newspapers, magazines, tabloids and internet apart from the competent sources such as the men of letters, the writer's heir, the film director and the television management.

The attitudes and insights of onlookers of the electric cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* shown by the TVRI varied. Some of them appreciated it, some taunted it with vile language and the others protested it. Appreciation was given by the men of letters and film directors such as Putu Wijaya, Taufik Ismail and many onlookers. However, the onlookers from Padang protested it so emotionally that they threatened to kill the assistant film director as the character Datuk Maringgih was evaluated to despise the Minang tradition.

Actually, Datuk Maringgih in the version shown by the TVRI did not distort the referent text. In the novel Datuk was only a name and did not refer to any traditional leader. The character was named Datuk Maringgih as he always wanted to be respected and was crazy about positions. Such a character was strengthened in the electric cinema shown by the TVRI. The limited ability of the onlookers in Padang to appreciate it gave rise to the problem that one of them threatened to fight the Assistant Film Director, Sjafral, who was also head of the *Parfi* in West Sumatra.

The critical public study was also directed to the electric cinema shown by the Trans TV. It was considered a cultural waste as it differed from the original story. A group of onlookers represented by an academician from the Indonesian Department, the University of Sekaran Gunung Jati, performed a pseudo-judicature. It was like a real one as there were a judge, a public prosecutor, a lawyer and an expert witness with "the Sitti Nurbaya's Rapist" as the agenda. Such a pseudo-judicature was a parody against the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* shown by the TVRI as it was evaluated to despise the Indonesian literature. It was violent enough as outside the court the students

demonstrated and proposed that “the Sitti Nurbaya’s Rapist” be heavily punished. However, there was a counter-demonstration which stated that the electronic cinema was only an expression of art.

The Ideology of Popular Culture

Actually, the novel *Sitti Nurbaya* written by Mara Rusli is an interesting object which may be adapted into an electronic cinema. This is in accordance with what is stated by Walter Benjamin (in Pilliang, 2007: 129) that basically an art work may be legally reproduced using technology. Any reality may not only be reproduced but may also be perfectly simulated using the production technique. Both reality and fantasy may be simulated.

The term simulation is used by Baudrillard to explain the relationship among production, communication and consumption in the west consumer capitalistic community featured by overproduction, overcommunication and overconsumption through mass media, advertisements, supermarkets and amusement industry. However, the term simulation cannot be basically separated from the recent development of the west capitalistic community which is referred to as the postindustrial or consumer community. In the western consumer community, over production, overcommunication and overconsumption are the new ways in which power is obtained Pilliang, 2007: 131).

This is also stated by Baudrillard (in Pilliang, 2007: 131) that the west capitalistic community is in the end of social era. Furthermore, it is stated that the only masses which are in existence rather than social class. The power to dominate, the struggle for their ancestors’ ideology and the power to control territory are not their needs; instead, they need the power to express sex, products, enjoyment, style of appearance, face, hair, the color of nails and so forth. What the masses struggle for is differentiation through consumption (information, amusement and enjoyment).

What differentiated the two versions was that the version produced by the TVRI still showed the politics of power. To strengthen what is stated by Foucault, the electric cinema shown by the TVRI came from the party having the power, namely the government, whereas that shown by the Trans TV came from an entrepreneur. The version shown by the TVRI showed the government hegemony to struggle for the state ideology and to control the state territory. The concept of the state ideology which had been inherited from the state predecessors referred to the concept of preserving the cultural heritage and maintaining the unity and unification as one the visions of the TVRI, namely, to maintain the existence of the Republic of Indonesia as a one-territorial area.

The concept introduced by Facoult as described above is identical with what the TVRI, the only TV station belonging to the government, has struggled for.

DISCUSSION

The textual transposition taking place in the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* both shown by the TVRI and the Trans TV turned out to match what the modern aesthetics demanded for. The forms of textual transposition such as deconstruction, distortion and appreciation were identical with the forms of parody in the postmodern aesthetics such as pastiche, camp, *kitch* and *skizofernia*. The textual crossing resulting from intertextuality was found to take place in the elements of plot, setting and characterization of the version shown by the Trans TV. The conventional plot in the version shown by the Trans TV was made so twisting that it broke the referent text. The setting where the story took place was deconstructed. It was made to take place in the metropolitan city Jakarta, rather than in West Sumatra and Batavia. The story was made to take place around 2000 rather than from 1900 – 1920. The atmosphere was also changed from the colonial situation into the reformation situation. Such a transposition might be categorized as the deconstruction of setting. The reason is that the film director deleted or crossed out the system of sign in the referent text.

The same thing also took place in the characterization of the version shown by the Trans TV. The main character Samsulbahri was changed into the one who was a play boy, aggressive, false and was not easily submissive. In the referent text, he was evaluated to be a physically weak young man and easily frustrated by the men of letters, Djoko Damono and Maman S Mahayana. Such damage was not only a transposition and deconstruction but also a distortion or parody. The reason is that such a distortion was critical in nature and contained parodies. Such a critical attitude was shown by the character Samulbahri who was not easily submissive and was always prepared to face challenges. This might be evaluated to be a parody that in the modern era a young man should not be tearful and easily frustrated.

The character Samsulbahri in the version shown by the Trans TV was shown to be different from the novel and the version shown by the TVRI. At school he was a favorite and girls were fond of him. In the novel he only loved Sitti Nurbaya. Such a transposition of the system of sign was also a criticism criticizing the main character's principle to live eternally both on earth and in the heaven. However, the deconstruction and distortion done by the film director seemed inconsistent. Samsulbahri did a fatal thing

when he visited Sitti Nurbaya's grave, where he felt that he could not stand surviving any longer after being left by his lover. Finally, he committed suicide by injecting a dangerous substance into his body. The criticism and the parody made before were finally meaningless and seemed to be a game as the referent text was still considered to be a text which contained a holy and great love affair.

Appearing more cruelly and wickedly than the original character, Datuk Maringgih gave the image that he deconstructed the original text. In the novel, he never raped and only liked young ladies. In the version shown by the Trans TV, it was visualized that girls were sexually exploited sadistically that sexual coercion tended to take place. Such a change was related to the setting of atmosphere as in the past sex was considered a taboo subject and not to be visualized. Nowadays, the performances containing sexual exploitation have been common. Furthermore, the film or electronic cinema without any sexual nuisance is less interesting to the onlookers.

The public attitudes and the insights provided made the version of the electronic cinema shown by the TVRI a quality one, whereas that shown by the Trans TV was considered a cultural waste. Such an insight was provided based on the referent text, namely the original novel *Sitti Nurbaya*. The onlookers had had sufficient understanding of and appreciation for the content of the novel which they could compare with what was narrated in the electronic cinema. The version shown by the TVRI could maintain the original story and make the onlookers able to add more literary appreciation to what was narrated in the novel. That is why the electric cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* was able to defeat the others in 1990s. The version shown by the Trans TV deviated so greatly from the context of the novel written by Marah Rusli that it was protested as it could humiliate the socio-cultural values of the Minang people.

The insights provided by Baudrillard and Foucault into the consumer community were highly relevant, if related to the power and politics of the media, for analyzing electronic cinemas. Both the version of the electronic cinema shown by the TVRI and that shown by the Trans TV were the reproduction of the novel written by Marah Rusli. Such a reproduction was mechanically done through the technique of simulation and fantasy. Simulation, according to the concept introduced by Baudrillard, produced an audiovisual performance which attracted the onlookers. Such an audiovisual performance as the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* was watched by millions of people (overconsumption), was shown to every part of Indonesia (overcommunication) and was shown repeatedly (overproduction). The version shown by the TVRI was shown repeatedly on Sunday

afternoon during September 1991 and on Sunday evening during January 2011. The version shown by the Trans TV was shown repeatedly by the Malaysian TV3 on Monday, 6th October 2008, on Tuesday, 7th October 2008, on Wednesday, 8th October 2008 and on Thursday, 9th October 2008. This means that the western concept of capitalism concerning overproduction, overconsumption and overcommunication was proved in the analysis of this electronic cinema.

NOVELTIES

1. The representation of popular culture in the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* shown by the TVRI and the Trans TV resulted in transposition which crossed, distorted, deleted, protested politically and appreciated the referent text. Such a transposition was in the forms of textual deconstruction, distortion and appreciation. The textual deconstruction and distortion were found in the version shown by the Trans TV and the textual appreciation was found in the version shown by the TVRI.

2. The attitudes of and the insights provided by the onlookers, which could be observed from the critical public study of the textual distortion, deconstruction and appreciation of the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya* gave rise to cultural shock. The character Datuk was visualized to be highly wicked, tricky and to have many wives. One onlooker in Padang, on behalf of his group, showed his anger and a protest while bringing a sword and wished to kill the assistant film director. This, according to the researcher, resulted from a misunderstanding when he watched the electric cinema. Both in the electric cinema text and in the novel text, it was clearly stated that the word “datuk” before *Mariggih* did not refer to any traditional title but was only “*hanyo panggilan sajo baginyo*” (just a term of address). Datuk Maringgih was someone who was crazy about being respected, although he was a trader selling salted fish at Padang Market.

3. Cultural shock was also experienced by the onlookers watching the version shown by the Trans TV. A Minang man who stayed far from Minangkabau criticized the Trans TV and urged that the electric cinema be stopped as it humiliated the Minang community. The other group of onlookers, the academicians from the Indonesian language Department of the University of Sekaran Gunung Jati Semarang, showed their protest gently, namely in the form of a parody or satire. They performed a “pseudo-judicature” to try the “Trans TV *Sitti Nurbaya*”.

4. The difference of the version shown by the TVRI from that shown by the Trans TV could not be separated from the hegemony and ideology of the media. The TVRI

station is the only government TV station and the Trans TV is a private one. The TVRI, as the TV station belonging to the government, should adjust its programs to the state ideology, while the Trans TV, as a private one, tends to be commercial by absorbing the global culture and setting aside the local culture. In other words, the Trans TV can be stated to adhere to the capitalistic ideology by adapting the global culture.

CONCLUSIONS

The novel *Sitti Nurbaya*, as a high quality Indonesian literary work, after being shown as an electronic cinema by the TVRI station and the Trans TV station, gave rise to dissatisfaction among the onlookers. This could be proved by the critical public study showing that many onlookers protested the version shown by the Trans TV. The quality of the version shown by the Trans TV was stated to be bad. The reason was that the story was not realistic, showed scenes of coercion, luxury, and pornography. In addition, it also deviated from the original story written by Marah Rusli. As a result, the producer and the Trans TV station were extremely criticized and were urged that the electric cinema would not be shown any more as it was stated to humiliate the Minang people where the setting of the famous novel took place.

The difference of the version shown by the TVRI station from that shown by the Trans TV station could not be separated from the ideology of the media. The TVRI, as the TV station under the government, should adopt its programs to the state ideology. The visions of the TVRI are to create unity and unification, to preserve the culture inherited from the state ancestors and to maintain the territory of the Republic of Indonesia. It was not surprising, therefore, that the version shown by the TVRI referred to the state ideology. The Trans TV, as a private TV station, adheres to the capitalistic ideology. The version shown by the Trans TV adjusted to what was demanded for by the capital owner, namely financial benefit. Its programs follow the market taste in order to acquire the high rating. The higher the rating the more advertisements there will be and this will benefit the TV station owner.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the conclusions withdrawn above, the suggestions which may be provided in this study are as follows:

1. A forum such as the electronic cinema forum, through which discussions may be held, is needed. Its members are those who care about electronic cinemas. They are expected

to give input to the Indonesia Broadcasting Commission (Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia/KPI) and the Film Censoring Institution (Lembaga Sensor Film/LSF).

2. From the educational point of view, the electronic cinema *Sitti Nurbaya*, both the version shown by the TVRI and that shown by the Trans TV may be used as a literary learning media. An electronic cinema may be an interesting learning material which may eliminate the impression that literature may only be learned either theoretically or by memorization.

3. The tendency for the electronic cinemas to adhere to the global culture through what is dreamed of by Hollywood with its Eurisian stars (European-Asian) should be reviewed again by creating a new phenomenon referred to as the glocalization culture (global-local). What is meant is that the global way of thinking is adapted to the local conditions. Through glocalization, the Indonesian electric cinemas which contain local cultures, if done using global technology, will be internationally recognized.

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