

## COMMODIFICATION OF TODAY'S WAYANG TOPENG PERFORMANCE IN MALANG

Tri Wahyunigtyas

Student of Doctoral Program in Cultural Studies at UNUD  
three\_tari73@yahoo.com

### ABSTRACT

Wayang Topeng is a drama-shaped performance performed by dancers wearing masks who not only hide their faces but there are also more essential and symbolic purposes. Wayang topeng performances are always associated with rites as a medium of worshiping ancestral spirits. Nowadays, Wayang Topeng is undergoing a change, from a routine event to be a show for tourists held by one of the hotels in Malang city. The change, in the performance' format from a stage show into a tourism packaging show, made the Wayang Topeng to experience a shift in its values and original meanings. It is suspected that it has shifted the cultural value that were once a traditional culture to the direction of mass culture. This phenomenon is seen not only as an adjustment to the media format, but as a form of commodification. This research seeks to uncover forms, processes, ideologies, and powers related to the commodification of Wayang Topeng performance. This qualitative research uses interview data and observations which were analyzed using interpretation technique. The method used were the art phenomenology research with a study of critical discourse analysis. From the analysis of Wayang Topeng performance through interviews with several sources and combined with relevant literatures, the results show that: (1). Content commodification happened in the Wayang Topeng performance; (2). The ideology behind the process of commodification is capitalism. The power behind commodification is market power.

Keywords: Commodification, mass culture, Wayang Topeng

### INTRODUCTION

*Wayang Topeng* is a local product of culture from Malang region which has philosophical values related to the patterns of human life, especially reflecting the life's patterns of the people in Malang. According to Hidajat (2008: 10) *Wayang Topeng* is a drama or play performed by dancers wearing masks, in which the performers not only hide their faces, but it shows more essential and symbolic goals. As stated by Kuntowijoyo (1987: 54), traditional performances are basically not to be watched, but the presence of the show has a symbolic connection to the human life in a society. In addition, *Wayang Topeng* performances in Malang are closely related to religion, and it is realized that Malang people still worship the ancestral spirits. Some religious activities are often carried out by Malang people, one of which is the implementation of rituals such as *bersih desa*, *nyadran in punden* (a sacred place), and so on.

*Wayang Topeng* in Malang is currently experiencing developments and changes in accordance with the dynamics of the community supporting the show. It is realized that the current of globalization also had an impact on the changes of *Wayang Topeng* in Malang. The development of technology, communication media, and tourism made *Wayang Topeng* no longer fulfills the spiritual ties of the people as a means of ritual in achieving blessings and excellences. Instead, it made *Wayang Topeng* becomes a medium of politics, entertainment, and tourists' art attractions. It was realized that the economic needs and interests of capitalist ideology had dominated the minds of traditional art performers.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method is a qualitative study, and the data is in the form of words (oral or written) and the actions by Malang's *Wayang Topeng* performers and artists, spectators, businessmen, and the Culture and Tourism Service Agencies that were explored through in-

depth interviews and participant observation. Data collection techniques are carried out by a triangulation (combined) technique. The data analysis is inductive/ qualitative, and the results of qualitative research emphasize more on meanings rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2014: 13-14).

Oral data sources were obtained from sources being interviewed, including 37 year-old Tri Handoyo, the chairperson of *Padepokan Wayang Topeng* Asmarabangun Kedungmonggo Pakisaji, and Eko Ujang (an artist, 42 years old). Observations were made during the performance of *Wayang Topeng* in the studio / *padepokan* and tourist attractions located in some hotels in Malang. The purpose of this study is to describe: (1) how the practices of commodification of Malang's *Wayang Topeng* are carried out, (2) how the form of *Wayang Topeng* packaging is presented as an object of art.

Data analysis uses interpretation theory. The words and actions expressed by the *dalang* (puppeteer) are interpreted based on the denotation and connotation meanings and are related to the mass culture both synchronously or diachronically.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In accordance with the case of study, it is necessary to convey the meaning of commodification. According to Barker (2014: 41-42), commodification is a process that is closely related to capitalism in which objects, qualities, and signs are transformed into commodities. Commodity itself is understood as an item which its primary purpose is to be sold on the market. Commodification is a process of making something that was not previously a commodity, but at the end, it could become a commodity (Subrata, 2014: 13).

In the perspective of political economy, commodification usually embodies commercial forms in which the state places rules based on the market standards and also sets market rules. Commodification becomes the main tool to transform social relations into economic relations (Curran, 1996). Commodification has broad meanings and does not only concern the production of goods and services being traded, but it also includes the goods and services that are distributed and consumed. Therefore, the commodification of culture (*Wayang Topeng*) means turning performances into marketable products. Commodification supported by mass media in the form of marketing communication (advertising) will be able to threaten various forms of norms, values, identities, and symbols of local culture. Gradually, the values of local cultures such as those contained in *Wayang Topeng* will experience a shift and will even change the values in a new different level.

### Mask Puppet Show in Malang

*Wayang Topeng* which has developed around Malang region is a typical of drama performed by dancers wearing masks. Malang's *Wayang Topeng* belongs to the genre of the performing arts drama similar to *Wayang Wong* (human puppet). *Wayang Wong* is etymologically derived from the new Javanese word. *Wayang* means 'skin or shadow puppet', and the word *wong* means person or human being. Within the scope of Javanese dance, the word *wayang* always changes meaning to drama (or play), which is finally understood as a drama performed by humans (Soedarsono in Hidajat, 2011: 6).

Various performing arts researchers assume that *Wayang Topeng* in Malang have a direct link to the performance during the glorious days of Majapahit Kingdom, a drama known as *wayang wwang*. It is called *wayang wwang* because it comes from the word *wayang* in the ancient Javanese (*Kawi* language) which means "shadow" or "shadow performance", and the word *wwang* means human. Therefore, *wayang wwang* means a puppet show performed by humans. In written form, the information about *wayang wwang* can be found in the Wilamasrama inscription 930 AD (Hidajat, 2008: 10). *Wayang wwang* is a performance that requires the performer to wear a mask as a visual manifestation of the characters' characterizations. It is the oldest performance in Java, it spread to various regions such as in Central Java, West Java, and also Bali. *Wayang* as an embryo of the mask dance drama performance is closely related to the tradition of kingdom's performances during the glorious days of Majapahit kingdom (Soedarsono, 1997: 4). It was explained in the Negara Kretagama book that King Hayam Wuruk was a mask dancer in his days. This statement is supported by

poetry verses in Negara Kretagama book page LXVI verses 4-5, and page XCI verses 4-5 (Slamet Mulyana in Supriyanto, 1997: 5).

*Wayang Topeng* show is believed to have historical links with the growth of the oldest culture in Malang. It was from a kingdom that grew around the seventh century named Kanjuruhan. From the former kingdom of Kanjuruhan in Dinoyo area, there was a temple called Badut. Poerbatjaraka argues that Badut temple is associated with Raja Gajahyana or by another name Liswa which means a puppet child or a comedy performer, or a dancer, in Javanese language it is often called Badut (in Mustopo, 1984: 18).

*Wayang Topeng* in Malang has been historically associated with the local culture and community. It is based on the word *badut* or 'clown', which is the name of a temple to worship *lingga yoni*, the chronicles of the princes (Panji) from the glorious time of Kediri kingdom. Its presence as a performing arts palace began during Majapahit kingdom era until the present day in oral traditions. Not only does it come as an entertainment show, but it is also associated with a belief in the form of rites used to worship the ancestors.

*Wayang Topeng* dealing with the aspects of belief and worship of the ancestor spirits can survive due to four influential factors, namely; 1). Supportive society, 2). environment, 3). social class, and 4). religious system. Those factors shape the pattern of the performing arts' structure from one generation to future generations, so it has something to do with the dynamics of life to those who support the show (Hidajat, 2011: 10).

*Wayang Topeng* show is a religious communication media. It is generally viewed as a portrayal of characters who are revered, especially those who are considered having supernatural power, or special to the public or a legend. From a fairy tale comes what is called *pundhen*, comes from the word *pundhi* which means "honorable or adored". The fairy tale told by many people then developed a rite of worship or *pundhen*, which is arguably the beginning of *nyadran* tradition. Religious communication maintained by the public provides the strength for the continuation of *Wayang Topeng* show in Malang.

In the course of its development, *Wayang Topeng* show has changed its function and role as a means of a ritual. It is no longer a magical and sacred show but rather becomes a profane show. The need and importance of the show has more to do with economic interests as an open-air tourism art through the process of packing for tourism.

### **The Process of Commodification of *Wayang Topeng* Show**

Adorno in Ibrahim (1997: 24) stated that the birth of Indonesia's commodity societies can be characterized by a phenomenon that shows the support of the cultural industry for the masses like the proliferation of popular magazines, private television, VCD and DVD products, luxurious residences, entertainment centers, tourist areas, and modern shopping centers.

The emergence of various tourist attraction products in the performing arts including music, dance, or drama that have become people's interest now shows the symptoms of the emergence of a commodity society. A commodity, according to Lull (1998: 223), is anything that is produced or offered for sale. These goods and services always have ideological origins and consequences. *Wayang Topeng* show gives an illustration as a product of popular culture. The popular culture supported by the culture industry has reconstructed a society that is not merely based on consumption, but has also made all cultural artifacts as industrial products and certainly a commodity. In industrialization, standardize cultural products adapted to the market are also required.

Meanwhile, the large amount of effort to sell tourist attraction products in the form of *Wayang Topeng* in a large numbers is inevitable. This happens because the commodification of the tourism product of *Wayang Topeng* is determined by the tour organizers, including both the government and the private sector. In a consumer society, there are at least three forms of power that operate behind the production and consumption of aesthetic objects, namely capital power, producer power, and mass media power (Pilliang, 1998: 26). In this case, the one that holds the power of capital and producer power is the government or travel agent. Both have full power over the packaging of *Wayang Topeng* show. As a result, artists do not have the discretion to process their own art. Therefore, that artists are only used as industrial products that sometimes do not benefit or support the artists. *Wayang Topeng* artists are not given the opportunity to express their own cultural products, so what happens is that their appearance

sometimes does not look optimal. The role of the mass media in shaping people's image or views of *Wayang Topeng* show is very strong. This can be seen in billboards, leaflets, banners, tourism information news as a means of information, as a effort to promote and preserve traditional arts.

In short, it can be said that the existence of producers of tourist attractions is as the only controller of power, namely as the owner of capital, producers as well as holders of control of the mass media that can freely regulate the productivity of the packaging of attractions in *Wayang Topeng* shows. As a result, the traditional arts business in the packaging of *Wayang Topeng* tourism art products is increasing. The victims of the realized commodification of *Wayang Topeng* show tourist attraction products are the actors, because now the producer is the holder of power. The folk performance art, held in public space, is oriented to commodities (both political and economic), which politically it means that the art is used by certain groups for certain interests as well (Budiyo, 2005: 219).

### ***Wayang Topeng* Show as a Tourism Industry Product**

Tourism can be said as a "magnet" that is able to attract tourists to visit. A high appreciation for the development of tourism has led to an exploration of ideas and meanings that are more than just existing objects, but the overall empowerment of assets for these objects needs to be socialized to others. One of the ways is to create events to enrich meanings so that it can fulfill the interests to improve welfare and income as well as to expand networks and cooperations.

Various efforts were made to optimize the existence of tourism potentials through the promotion of tourism both cultural tourism and nature tourism. One of the promotions of cultural tourism is the traditional cultural tourism (or local tourism) of Malang, which is developed and packaged neatly and more commercially in order to attract tourists. One of the developed cultural tourism is *Wayang Topeng* show. The existence of *Wayang Topeng* shows in Malang has been widely held at tourism events either by the government or private parties in hotels or recreation areas.

In the context of tourism marketing, it certainly raises excitement in the promotion and sale value certain cultural art events. This is part of the practice of cultural commercialization, or as a part of cultural practice of capitalism and consumerism which then results in the commodification of traditional cultural arts in Malang. *Wayang Topeng* shows held at tourism events are also part of a capitalist industry which benefit several tourism agents who only prioritize economic value. Whereas, the artists are only 'tools' used to commercialize or to seek as much profit as possible. This is what signifies the industrialization process of the culture of commercialization in controlling the system. This shows that the standardization of *Wayang Topeng* show used as tourism art packaging or a product of commodification is determined by capital owners possessing market legal parameters. A product is considered standardized when it applies in the market and allows the process of cultural production in massive quantities resulting in any kind of culture being made into a commodity (Hilde & Kellner, 1996).

The industrialization of tourism from a political economy perspective can have a negative impact, referring to the calculation of cost benefits, in which the government or tourism art operators or agents benefit more from the implementation of the culture industry. It can be observed that *Wayang Topeng* shows, as part of the cultural industry, have made the agents to be art producers who play the role and act as a capitalist instrument. In Habermas's view, there is no aspect of life that is free from interests. The reality built from the contradictions of the agents' interests is always moving and developing, meaning that the role of ideology becomes dominant. Ideology distorts the actual reality in order to pass the interests of the ruling class. With the commodification, *Wayang Topeng* performance in Malang is dominated by economic, political, and power interests, which are the cores of capitalism.

The power of domination has sunk in every event held in several tourist attractions. The artists who work creatively have also created performances in accordance with the demands of the organizers, both from the elements of stories, clothings, stage settings to the *pocapan* of the puppeteer. It has formed a political capitalism, which is to link logic of capitalism and human relations being commodified. *Wayang Topeng* show is displayed as a tourist attraction commodity only to achieve economic and capitalism interests.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the tourism policy towards *Wayang Topeng* performance as a traditional art provides an alternative solution for employment for the artists. The demands for economic needs make traditional artists more creative in packaging *Wayang Topeng* show as a tourist attraction. *Wayang Topeng* show packaged as a tourism commodity through tourist art attractions is a major component in tourism marketing. In the perspective of political economy, it can be seen as the dominance of capitalism, including the existence of structured control over the power of agents who dominate the interests of power.

## REFERENCES

- Barker, Chris. 2014. *Kamus Kajian Budaya*. Yogyakarta: PT Kanisius
- Budiyono, Sunu Catur. 2005. *Sastra Lisan Tembang Kendang Kempul Identitas Dan Rivalitas Budaya*. Dalam Pustaka: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Budaya. UNUD: Yayasan Guna Widya.
- Curran, James and Michel Gurevitch. 1996. *Mass Media and Society*. New York, Arnold
- Hidajat, Robby. 2008. *Wayang Topeng Malang*. Malang: Gantar Gumelar
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. *Wayang Topeng Malang; Struktural dan simbolik Seni Pertunjukan di Malang Jawa Timur*. Malang: Gantar Gumelar
- Hilde, T., & Kellner, D. (1996). *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern*. *South Central Review*.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3189938>
- Kuntowijoyo. 1987. *Budaya dan Masyarakat*. Yogyakarta: PT Tiara Wacana.
- Lull, James. 1998. *Media, Komunikasi Kebudayaan : Suatu Pendekatan Global*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.
- Pilliang, Yasraf. 1998. *Dunia Yang di Lipat*. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra
- Subrata, I Wayan. 2014. *Komodifikasi Tari Barong*. Surabaya: Paramita
- Sugiyono. 2014. *Metode Penelitian Kombinasi (Mixed Methods)*. Bandung: Alfabeta