

Children's puppeteers Festival: Between Conservation and Art Education

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Abstract---This paper is the result of observations of the Child Puppet Festival held by Yogyakarta State University in 2018 and 2019. The festival, which is held annually to commemorate Yogyakarta State University's Dies Natalis, is attended by many child puppeteers from Yogyakarta and its surroundings. Organizing such a festival is very beneficial for various parties. One of the benefits obtained is the avoidance of puppets from the threat of extinction due to modernization that is sweeping the world. This study aims to describe the existence of *wayang kulit purwa* in the eyes of child puppeteers. The data of this research is the recording of shadow puppets performed by child puppeteers at the children's puppeteer festival at Yogyakarta State University in 2018 and 2019. This research shows that the puppet show still exists in the eyes of children, seen from the number of participants in the festival even though there are still disparities. Judging from the form of the show, what the child puppeteers display, from the perspective of art education, has not fully adopted the interests of children.

Keywords: *wayang kulit purwa*, puppeteer festival, art education

I. BACKGROUND

The world, through UNESCO on November 7, 2003, has recognized and designated Indonesian *wayang* as "A masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity". This recognition cannot be separated from the potential possessed by *wayang* which is said to be the result of high Javanese culture, because it contains elements of aesthetic, ethical, philosophical, symbolic, educational, recreational (entertainment) values and other values. This predicate is not the end of a struggle, but rather the beginning of a challenge to prove the ability of *wayang* to survive throughout the ages. The predicate given by Unesco could be revoked at any time if the puppet art could not preserve the life force and its role in the life of its supporting community. The challenges of the electronic communication media industry and popular culture are at stake whether the authorities in the puppet world are able to creatively and

adaptively carry out the transformation process so that puppet art remains relevant and plays a role in the flow of global cultural development where commercial values and popularity are determining factors in logic. competitive market and industrial world (Riyanto, 2011).

Throughout its history, *wayang* performances have changed according to society's needs from being strict with rules to loosely following existing trends to be liked by the public. All these changes cannot be separated from economic factors. If the show is liked by the public, many people will see the show either directly in a shadow puppet show or through electronic media. When the show is seen and covered a lot, the puppeteer will get a lot of income from the performance and coverage activities (Kusbiyanto, 2015). Changes that occur today are not only in terms of performances, but have switched media, for example by using technological sophistication such as the emergence of augmented reality technology in puppets (Dolhalit, et.al., 2013).

One of the efforts to overcome the threat of *wayang kulit* extinction has been carried out by Yogyakarta State University (UNY). For several years, UNY has routinely held the Little Puppeteer Festival. From April 21 to May 4, 2018, UNY again held the Little Puppeteer Festival. This festival features 32 puppeteers of elementary and junior high school children. On June 17 to 21, 2019 a similar festival was held again (Sakri, 2019). The 2019 festival was attended by 35 participants consisting of elementary and junior high school children (Rahman, 2019; Maulana, 2019; Madani, 2019; Yogi, 2019). The number of participants is indeed limited by the organizer. The quota was fulfilled not long after participant registration was opened (Sastrosoendjojo, 2019). Besides aiming to preserve. Besides aiming at preserving the cultural arts of the archipelago (Maulana, 2019), the festival also carries the theme "*wayang* as a medium for character education". This theme is in line with the potential of *wayang*. *Wayang*, like other arts, has a social dimension, which is a field of interaction between artists and the

community as parties who are expected to receive information or messages contained in the artwork (Triyanto, 2017: 71).

In a puppet show, the audience can get to know ethical teachings about what is good and what is bad. The actions of each *wayang* character in a particular play are often used by Javanese to understand the meaning of life or various concrete realities. *Wayang kulit* performances are always full of certain missions, essential moral values such as a loving relationship between parents and children, loyalty to the state, responsibility for the environment, and others (Kushendrawati, no year: 109).

The transmission of national cultural values in *wayang* performances is carried out in such a smooth manner through stylization, dramaturgy, singing, dialogue, songs and even *wayang* movements. Without realizing it, the audience of *wayang* puppets has received reflections on the various problems of life. Through a puppet show, the audience can feel and understand this without feeling like anyone has patronized it. It is not something that is made up if then the Javanese have to learn a lot through *wayang* performances. However, the puppeteers do not necessarily understand all the mastermind's intentions. To understand well, a knowledge of *wayang* and Javanese culture itself is required. In *wayang*, many things that are conveyed are only symbols or symbols, so it is necessary to think and understand them (Hadiprayitno, 2009: 523).

Among the symptoms above is the impact of shifting *wayang* performances today. These shifts and changes inevitably lead to a confusion of values. The old values have been abandoned, while the new values have not yet established their function and have not even been found. This is reflected in every leather puppet show today. Based on observations in the field, *wayang* offerings today tend to increasingly develop into forms of entertainment as a commercial commodity. The good thing is that the puppet show today is still in a quantitative way, even though it is hit by modernization and advances in technology, information, and communication. *Pakeliran wayang* still exists in its supporting community even though its presentation is sacred, magical, and symbolic and contains artistic, cultural, and religious moral values that appear false (Kusbiyanto, 2015: 594).

This study aims to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the 2018 and 2019 *dalang anak* festival at UNY in terms of conservation and arts education. This research will be useful as a reference for the implementation of the festival in the coming years.

II. METHOD

This research is qualitative. The research data is the recording of *wayang kulit purwa* performances by little puppeteers at the 8th Puppet Puppet Festival at Yogyakarta State University, 21 April to 4 May 2018, and the 9th, 17-21 June 2019, as well as observation notes. Data collected from various sources. The collected data were analyzed using an interactive data analysis model consisting of three main steps: reducing the data, displaying the data, and making conclusions. The performance of the child puppeteers is explored from the perspective of conservation and art education.

Research Result

The large number of child puppeteers who participate in the festival shows that shadow puppets still exist in society. For the time being, puppetry activists can breathe a sigh of relief because the threat of extinction can be pushed aside at least temporarily. Overall, what was shown by the little puppeteers who participated in the festival showed that the puppets were quite understood by children. This fact also proves that *wayang* does not only belong to adults, although many things in this art of puppetry are not on the side of children. These child puppeteers are both amazing and adorable.



Figure 1. Nareswara Praba, grade 1 student of MI Al Alim Islamic boarding school Hanacaraka Wonogiri, one of the participants of the 2019 Little Puppeteer Festival, is demonstrating at his school (Yogi, 2019).



Figure 2. Riwis Limar Cendhani, a female participant in the 2019 Little Puppeteer Festival (Rahman, 2019).

The performance structure performed by the little puppeteers fulfilled the pathos sequence like a shadow puppet all night long, although in some elements the little puppeteers did not manage to deliver it perfectly. The story structure is also firmly divided between the embryo of the story, the climax, and the anticlimax. The weaknesses of the puppeteers on an average lie in the dramatization, which, even though it has been worked out in such a way, still shows its imperfection due to several obstacles.

The main obstacle lies in the lack of mastery of the Javanese language puppet model as well as the tone of voice of certain *wayang* figures according to the convention which is not successfully lived up to. Some puppeteers prioritize the *wayang* figure's tone of voice rather than having to choose to voice sadness or joy according to the mood of the figure being sung. This choice causes the storyline to feel monotonous, without emphasizing a certain atmosphere. Some of the puppeteers at elementary school age still find it difficult to distinguish the sound of each puppet figure that is performed. The language used by these little puppeteers is a scripting language that is sometimes not well understood.



Figure 3. Glued to the script (private photo collection)

Still in terms of sound, when singing *suluk* - a typical song performed by the puppeteer to shape or support the atmosphere - some puppeteers still find it difficult to match their *suluk* notes with gamelan tones. Most of the puppeteers have already mastered the gamelan tone, so the *suluk* is also in the right tone, but feels bland without appreciation. *Suluk* is only sung to fulfill the needs of the convention rather than shaping or supporting the atmosphere.



Figure 4. Looking up for the high note (private photo collection)

The size of the puppets used by the little puppeteers is the standard *wayang* for adult puppeteers so that some puppeteers still have difficulty demonstrating the skills in processing puppet movements (*sabet*). The movement potential of *wayang kulit* with its strict rules is not well mastered either. The difficulty of the puppeteers is not only when moving the puppets, but also when they stick the puppets into the banana tree where the puppets are embedded. Their tiny bodies seem less powerful enough to stick the puppets to a sufficient depth so that the puppets do not appear to touch the ground. The war scene looks pretty slick, even some puppeteers show skills above their peers.



Figure 5. *Wayang* too big (private photo collection)

The stories or plays that are presented are dominated by heroic themes with the accentuation of one character, for example, the play *Gathutkaca Lair*, *Gathutkaca Wisuda*. Some present the play of the descent of the award, for example, *Abhimanyu Nugraha*. There are also plays with the background of the Ramayana epic, for example, the episode or play *Rama Tambak*. The plays are packaged in such a way that they can be performed for approximately

35 minutes. Play-processing skills are needed in such solid packaged *wayang*. Although these little puppeteers do not write their scripts when they fully stage they are the conductors. This role can be done very well by the puppeteers. Unfortunately, the processed dishes displayed by the little puppeteers still contained elements of violence through war scenes that had not been packaged beautifully. The defense of the war scene in the *wayang* play is quite reasonable. The first reason is the puppet convention which requires the display of war scenes. The second reason, war scenes are often used to demonstrate skill in *wayang* movement processing skills. In this war scene, the puppeteer can explore all the potential manipulative movements of the puppets to create “amazing” motion effects.



Figure 6. Fight scene (private photo collection)

III. DISCUSSION

The greatness of these little puppeteers cannot be separated from the role of their parents and their coaches or teachers. Of course, it was with the extra diligence that the teachers had that little puppeteers were born who would later become masters of the puppetry universe. The teachers can make the puppeteers with limited time succeed in presenting the *wayang* as it is with all the conventions they can catch. Seen from an educational perspective, what the puppeteers' display shows success because the success of education is marked by the extent to which the process of transferring knowledge can maintain and continue culture from one generation to another (Triyanto, 2017: 80). This is where conservative value comes into play. Although some conventions seem abandoned, the preservation of performance reflects conservation. The puppeteers still play with irreplaceable puppets, with screens, banana stalks, blencong lamps, *wayang* arrangements (*simpingan*), accompaniments that follow conventions. At this stage, the ideology of conservation dominates the implementation of the festival. If there are other ideologies at play there, for example, a competitive

ideology - following the nature of the festival which is a competition arena - but the conservation ideology is maintained. Art is an ideological activity as well as an ideological product. Art is the result of cultural creativity that reflects an artist's ideology and the ideology of the people (Triyanto, 2017: 55).

There is an interesting point here, namely the conservation ideology which from the perspective of art education must be addressed with caution. These child puppeteers seem to be just a bunch of imitators of adult actions. This is understandable because these little puppeteers are certainly seen as not having the skills to plan their performances. They can suddenly improvise, but if they come out of the instructions of their teachers, they will certainly be considered as harmful actions.

Seen from its activities, art provides space, time, and opportunity for the actors to carry out creative and appreciative activities (Triyanto, 2017: 84). Creative activity is the complexity of the creative process through various stages, starting from mobilizing intuition or imagination to get meaningful ideas, constructing ideas into a concept of ideas, and expressing them through media manipulation skills, to becoming a work that can be sensed. This stage is called expressive-artistic (Triyanto, 2017: 64-65). This stage will be obtained through early, appreciative activities. Appreciative activity in this case is not just a passive action that only pays attention through the process of observing, appreciating, enjoying, and justifying certain impressions of an art object, but also an active action that can lead to expressive behavior (Triyanto, 2017: 74).

Has the process that the puppeteers went through have met the stages as mentioned above? This is a big question. In this case, the child seems only to be the executor of the parents' will. They have not been able to create totally, because what they bring is imitations based on the instructions of adults. Hamersley argues that children and adults occupy very different positions in society and therefore they have very different experiences and perspectives, so that children should not be considered the same as adults, or be imperfect versions of adults. The implication is that the perspective of adults should not be forced on children and their world (Hammersley, 2017: 115).

In the World Declaration of Human Rights, education for children should be directed towards the development of the child's personality, talents, mental and physical condition to the stage of a comprehensive potential (Rohidi, 2014: 7). Art education that emphasizes emotional development, can balance cognitive and emotional development, and in turn will contribute to the development of a healthy and safe culture (Rohidi, 2014: 11).

Children must be treated as active agents, not just passive objects because their childhood is a social construct. Even an expert named Rousseau

believes that if children learn to be independent and are allowed to develop naturally, they can overcome the problems of corruption and degeneration brought about by civilization, which most adults are currently unable to do (Hammersley, 2017). Children must be directed as activists through three activities such as those mentioned in the structure of art education, namely: (1) studying artistic works, (2) knowing and experiencing first-hand artistic works, (3) engaging in work processes or activities. art. If these three things have been well integrated into the preparation process of these little puppeteers, their creative power will grow according to their potential and more focused understanding. In turn, these little puppeteers will demonstrate their skills in playing *wayang* according to their version.

In this study, it was found that the performances by the little puppeteers as described above did not reflect the children's version of the show. What is expressed by the child puppeteers represents how the process of art education is going through. Little puppeteers acquire mastermind expertise in various ways. Some are obtained from their parents, from teachers, and media such as YouTube or video recordings. Whatever method they experience, all of them lead them to the notion that a good *wayang* is what the patron puppeteers do. In fact, from the sources they took, none of them showed the children's version of the puppet. Indeed, in reality, *wayang* does not have a children's version like that of other branches of art, for example, songs for children, dance for children, and children's paintings. In *wayang*, there is no child version so that children completely want to be like the puppeteers of their idols. This is where art educators should come into play so that the child puppeteers have their version.

This research is useful for the community as a consideration for the implementation of similar festivals in the future.

IV. CONCLUSION

A high award deserves to be given to Yogyakarta State University which has held several times the Little *dalang* Festival. This annual festival will always be awaited by little puppeteers, both those who acquire mastermind skills independently, through non-formal education through art communities in society, as well as formal education obtained from schools. From a conservation point of view, this activity is very positive, because it becomes an arena for the regeneration of puppetry. In terms of art education, there is still an imbalance, where children have not succeeded in expressing their childishness in a performance format. The conservation ideology - both conservation of form and value - which is blown through this activity will be successful if it is welcomed by trainers, teachers, and parents with the principles of art education by

fulfilling children's rights to develop without excessive interference from the parents' egos. In this way, the tension between conservation and arts education can be eliminated or minimized.

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