


Art and Narrative in Reog Ponorogo: Collaboration of Oral Tradition and Performance as Cultural Heritage

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the cultural expressions of Ponorogo district manifested in two main dimensions: oral literature and the performing art of Reog Ponorogo. Oral literature in Ponorogo has an important role in maintaining tradition and history, while Reog Ponorogo as a performing art form depicts local values and mythologies that are passed down through generations. This study aims to analyze the relationship between the two cultural dimensions in shaping the identity of the Ponorogo community, as well as the challenges of modernization that affect its sustainability. This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach that allows researchers to understand the Ponorogo culture deeply from the perspective of the local community. Based on field studies and existing literature, this article concludes that these two cultural expressions support each other and become an integral part of the cultural identity of the Ponorogo Regency. Using a qualitative and ethnographic approach, this article will examine how these two cultural dimensions interact with each other in shaping Ponorogo's distinctive cultural identity.

Keywords: *Origin Myth, Cultural Value, Function, And Reog Ponorogo Dance*

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INTRODUCTION

Ponorogo Regency, known as the "Reog City," is a region rich in cultural traditions, particularly in terms of oral literature and performing arts. One of the most prominent cultural elements is Reog Ponorogo, a traditional performing art that reflects the identity of the local community. In Reog Ponorogo, oral literature plays an important role as a medium of cultural expression that connects generations to generations. As stated by Supriyanto (2015), "Reog Ponorogo is not only a performing art, but also a manifestation of local wisdom that is rooted in the lives of the people of Ponorogo."

Oral literature in Ponorogo, which consists of folktales, myths, and legends, serves not only as entertainment, but also as a means of conveying deep cultural values. On the other hand, the Reog Ponorogo performance art reflects the power of mythology, spirituality, and social symbolism of the Ponorogo community. According to Rahayu (2017), oral literature in Ponorogo is a mirror of the social life of the community that contains their philosophy, morality, and worldview.

Reog Ponorogo, has a complex performance form, bringing together various cultural elements, such as dance, music, and drama. It creates a direct link between the younger generation and ancestral values through performances that are educational, entertaining, as well as a means of unifying the community. Geertz's (1973) approach to culture as a system of meanings is very relevant in this context, where oral literature and the Reog performing arts become symbols for the people of Ponorogo.

This study holds significant value in the context of preserving and developing local cultural heritage. Oral literature and the Reog Ponorogo performing arts are two cultural

expressions that not only represent the cultural identity of the Ponorogo community but also contain educational, philosophical, and spiritual values. These can be utilized in character education, national identity reinforcement, and Indonesia's cultural diplomacy on a global stage. Given the current shift in younger generations' preferences toward global pop culture, documenting and critically analyzing local cultural heritage becomes an essential strategy to safeguard intangible cultural assets.

Practically, the findings of this study can serve as reference material for educators, artists, local government officials, and cultural communities in designing programs aimed at preserving and revitalizing local traditions. Furthermore, this study promotes a new perspective in cultural research by exploring the intertextual relationship between oral literature and performing arts—two domains that are often examined separately. This research aims to explore the relationship between oral literature and the performing art of Reog Ponorogo. Using a qualitative and ethnographic approach, this article will examine how these two cultural dimensions interact with each other in shaping Ponorogo's distinctive cultural identity.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with an ethnographic approach, aiming to explore the cultural meaning, social interactions, and efforts to preserve the Reog Ponorogo tradition from the perspective of the local community. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with Reog artists, traditional leaders, oral literature practitioners, and young people in Ponorogo who are actively involved in cultural activities. Participant observation was also carried out during cultural events such as Grebeg Suro, an annual festival that serves as a vital space for the expression and revival of Reog Ponorogo. Additionally, documentation studies were used to examine various cultural artifacts, including folklore texts, local manuscripts, traditional song scripts, and Reog performance videos.

The data were analyzed using a hermeneutic approach and cultural discourse analysis to uncover the deeper meanings behind the cultural symbols present in Reog performances and to examine how these values are constructed, interpreted, and transmitted across generations. Text analysis was conducted to understand the narrative structure of Ponorogo's oral literature and its symbolic representation in Reog. Literature studies of previous research on oral literature and performing arts in Ponorogo were also included to provide a broader contextual understanding. Through this multi-method approach, the research successfully mapped the interaction between oral literature and performing arts, revealing how both serve as vital tools in sustaining and reinforcing the local cultural identity of the Ponorogo community.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reog Ponorogo Oral Literature as a Cultural Foundation

Oral literature in Ponorogo plays a very important role in the transmission of cultural values. Folklore and myths that developed in the Ponorogo community often serve as the basis for the Reog performance art. One well-known example of folklore is the legend of Ki Ageng Kutu, which revolves around a struggle against injustice. In this story, Ki Ageng Kutu is portrayed as a hero who uses wisdom to overcome major problems in society (Saptaningtyas, 2010). This story is then transformed into the performing art form of Reog, with the main character portraying the role of Ki Ageng Kutu as a symbol of the struggle for truth against injustice.

This kind of folklore contains moral messages that are not only received by the older generation, but also conveyed to the younger generation through the performing arts. Oral literature in Ponorogo also has symbolic power that reflects the social and political life of the community. Some of the stories developed in Ponorogo oral literature contain allegories that

can be interpreted according to the context of the times, creating a connection between the past and the present.

Local myths, such as stories about the origins of Reog and the lion barong mask, also serve as a means to explain the cosmological and spiritual values of the people of Ponorogo. The lion barong mask, famous in Reog performances, contains symbolism of strength and courage that is often associated with the preservation of ancestral values passed down through oral stories. This shows how oral literature becomes a tool to preserve and communicate the beliefs and worldview of the people of Ponorogo.

Oral literature also serves to strengthen social cohesion. The stories circulating in society, whether in the form of legends or myths, help create a sense of community and collective identity. This is particularly important in maintaining shared values in Ponorogo society, given the social changes and globalization that affect the way of life of modern society.

Reog Ponorogo as Intangible Cultural Heritage Oral Literature

Oral literature is a form of cultural expression that is passed down verbally from one generation to the next. In the context of Reog Ponorogo, oral literature includes folklore, mantras, verses, and dialog that form part of the performance. Folktales, such as the legends of King Kelana Sewandana and Singo Barong are central to the narrative of Reog Ponorogo. According to Hadiwijaya (2010), "Folklore in Reog Ponorogo is not only entertainment, but also holds deep historical and philosophical values."

Reog Ponorogo is one of East Java's traditional performing arts that contains a strong element of oral literature. In each performance, Reog tells a folktale that is orally transmitted and passed down from generation to generation. The stories tell of the journey of King Kelono Sewandono, his battle with Singo Barong, and the devotion and loyalty of his followers such as Warok and Jathil. These narratives are not formally written, but are spoken directly by the performers through dialog, poetry, and mantras in the Old Javanese language that are full of spiritual and symbolic values.

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, Reog Ponorogo was officially designated as an Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013 in the category of Oral Tradition and Expression. This determination is based on the fact that reog performances rely on elements of oral speech that live and develop in the community (Kemendikbud, 2013). In addition, in a scientific study conducted by Diah Ayu Ningsih from Surabaya State University, it was stated that reog is a representation of oral literature because the storytelling in the performance is hereditary, unwritten, and delivered through oral improvisation of the performers (Ningsih, 2017).

The element of oral literature in reog is also evident from the use of typical language, including mantras and traditional verses recited by warok figures. This strengthens the position of reog as a form of folk art that not only functions as entertainment, but also as a means of preserving the cultural values, local history, and spirituality of the people of East Java. The mantras and poems sung in Reog performances contain deep symbolic meanings. For example, the opening mantra often contains prayers and wishes for safety, blessings and success. This oral literature is also an informal educational tool that teaches local history and cultural identity to the younger generation (Santoso, 2018).

Reog Performance Art as Cultural Representation

Reog Ponorogo is a performing art that combines various elements, such as dance, music, costumes, and oral literature. The main dances performed by characters such as warok, jathil, and barongan depict stories derived from oral literature. Each dance movement has a symbolic meaning that is often explained through narration or dialog delivered by the puppeteer or performance leader (Widodo, 2016).

The music in Reog Ponorogo, which uses instruments such as drums, gongs, and angklung, creates a magical atmosphere that supports the storytelling. The lyrics of the songs sung are also part of oral literature, describing the journey, struggles, and hopes of the characters in the story. "Traditional music in Reog Ponorogo is not only a supporting element, but also an effective medium of cultural communication" (Prasetyo, 2014).

Costumes and props in the reog, such as the magnificent Singo Barong mask and Warok headdress, reinforce the visualization of the story. All these elements work together to create an immersive and moving experience for the audience (Setiawan, 2017).

Reog Ponorogo is not just entertainment, but also a form of spiritual and social expression that illustrates the power of local mythology. In every Reog performance, there are several important elements, such as the large and colorful lion barong mask, and the jathilan dance that adds a dramatic impression. According to Kusumandari (2016), Reog Ponorogo serves as a tool to express deep social values, such as courage, honor, and leadership. The show also reflects the social structure of Ponorogo society, where warok (local heroes) and gemblak (young dancers) serve as symbols of honor and devotion to the community.

As a performing art, Reog Ponorogo contains educational values that transmit moral and spiritual teachings to the audience, especially to the younger generation. The show often contains messages about the importance of maintaining harmony in society, as well as teaching the meaning of struggle and sacrifice. This reflects the important role of Reog in shaping the character and morality of the people of Ponorogo.

In the context of the Grebeg Suro ritual, Reog Ponorogo not only functions as entertainment, but also as a ceremony to honor ancestors and invoke blessings for the prosperity of the community. This shows that Reog Ponorogo has a sacred dimension that cannot be separated from the cultural identity of Ponorogo itself. The rituals performed during this festival revive local history, mythology, and symbols passed down through oral literature and performing arts.

In addition, in a socio-political context, Reog Ponorogo also functions as a means to criticize social and political injustices that occur in society. The dance and music in Reog performances, with their symbolic power, provide a space for people to express their feelings and aspirations through art. This shows that Reog performance art is not only a cultural medium, but also a tool to voice social change.

Linkages between Oral Literature and Performing Arts

The relationship between oral literature and the performing arts of Reog Ponorogo is symbiotic. Oral literature provides the story foundation and philosophical meaning, while the performing arts present the story in an attractive visual and auditory form. "The collaboration between oral narratives and visual elements in Reog Ponorogo creates a performance full of meaning and appeal" (Wahyudi, 2020).

In practice, puppeteers or performance leaders often add improvisations to the narrative to suit the social context and the needs of the audience. This shows the flexibility of oral literature as a dynamic and adaptive medium (Haryanto, 2019).

Oral literature and the performing arts of Reog Ponorogo interact and support each other in forming a strong Ponorogo cultural identity. The narratives in the oral literature become the thematic foundation for the Reog performance. For example, the story of the struggle against tyranny in the Ki Ageng Kutu story is brought to life in the performance with the visualization of a lion barong that depicts a force that fights injustice. In this way, the oral literature not only becomes part of the story, but also the basis that gives meaning to the performance.

In addition, Reog performance art strengthens the collective memory of oral literature. Through performances that directly involve the audience, the values contained in oral literature are not only understood through words, but also through visual and emotional experiences. This makes performing arts more effective in conveying cultural messages and values to the community.

Oral literature also provides a deep historical and philosophical context for Reog performances. When a performance begins, the audience not only sees the dance and music, but they also absorb the meaning behind each movement and symbolic element. Reog Ponorogo, in this case, serves as a tool to tell the story that already exists in oral literature, while providing a more lively and dynamic interpretation in accordance with the times.

In the midst of globalization and modernization, the question arises as to how these two cultural dimensions can survive and be relevant to the younger generation. Many factors, such as changes in lifestyle, technology and education, affect the involvement of the younger generation in preserving the oral literature and performing arts of Reog. Therefore, it is important to create a space where these two cultural dimensions can complement each other and thrive, for example by integrating technology in the performance or documentation of oral literature.

CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between oral literature and the performing arts of Reog Ponorogo is symbiotic, with oral literature providing the narrative and philosophical foundation, while the performing arts deliver these stories through compelling visual and auditory performances. This dynamic interaction not only reinforces Ponorogo's cultural identity but also allows the values embedded in oral narratives, such as resistance to injustice exemplified in the Ki Ageng Kutu story, to be visually and emotionally experienced by audiences through symbolic elements like the lion barong. The flexibility of oral literature, which allows for narrative improvisation based on audience and context, underscores its adaptive nature, while Reog performances, in turn, help sustain and transmit collective memory. In an era of globalization and modernization, preserving this cultural synergy becomes increasingly challenging, especially among the younger generation affected by changing lifestyles and technological influences. Therefore, integrating technology into performances and documentation could offer a pathway for relevance and sustainability. Future studies may explore comparative analyses between Reog and other traditional Indonesian performing arts, such as Wayang, Ludruk, or Barong Bali, to better understand intertextual adaptations of oral narratives across the archipelago.

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