

Self Reflection Rituals In Packing Of The Virtual Traditional Performing Art In The Covid-19 Pandemic Era

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Abstract: Restrictions on large-scale social activities in order to reduce the impact of the transmission and/or spread of the covid-19 pandemic, have led to the decline of various art activities, especially for performing arts artists that based on traditional. In order to maintain their existence in the arts, most of the tradition-based performing arts communities residing in Yogyakarta and in Surakarta-Central Java, they change the style or pattern of performances that were previously direct (can be seen by the audience directly) into virtual performance patterns. The term 'mengamen or ngamen' which means walking around with singing and/or playing music to earn money, was changed by the introduction of the new term 'ngamen online', namely virtual busking. In addition, they have more focus on the concept of ritual which is packaged in a minimalist way into a virtual form. The ritual concepts in the show are a representation of self-reflection or even a form of expression of Eastern aesthetic "renaissance" in response to changes in social activities caused by the impact of the Covid-19 presence. This paper reviews the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on traditional-based performing arts which is the result of defending the existence of the supporting community as self-reflection material aimed at the audience and the artists themselves.

Keywords: Self-Reflection, Rituals, Virtual Performing Arts, Impact of Covid-19.

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INTRODUCTION

This article is a continuation of previous research that has a comparison. The similarity between this article and the previous article is that they both discuss the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the activities of traditional performing arts artists. As for the difference, the previous article focused on tourism activities that was done by traditional performing art artists, while this article have more concentrates on the artists' self-reflection in facing the challenges of the covid-19 pandemic (Sunaryo, 2021).

The covid-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on art and cultural life, especially traditional performing arts throughout areas of Indonesia, include the Yogyakarta and Surakarta - Central Java. Performing arts which in this case refers to one of the media for the advancement of the creative economy, it have a close relationship that supports each other's development. Therefore, there are at least two things that can be used as the background of this work, namely the impact of covid-19 on the life of the performing arts and the reciprocal relationship between changes in the activities of its performers or cultural artists with their influence on the progress of the creative economy.

The existence of the corona virus pandemic or better known as covid-19 (corona virus 2019) which entered and spread in Indonesia since around March 2020 until now has had a negative impact on all aspects of social life. Lack of public awareness about the dangers of a pandemic that may result in government policies regarding rules for limiting large-scale social activities are often issued in order to suppress the rate of spread or transmission of the virus. One aspect that has fallen as a result of the restrictions on large-scale social activities is the existence of performing arts and the survival of the artists or their supporting communities.

Entertainment stages or other places as production spaces for the performing arts was be closed with a time delay, until with no certainty as to when they will re-open. In this case, they (artists and/or art performers) have delayed performance schedules or even canceled. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the artists and the ecosystem in them are still required to adapt the situations and conditions in order to produce works of art as moral responsibility form for their artistic professionalism.

This case is especially with traditional performing arts artists. Those who are used to the collective workings with the principle of the "gotong royong" (work collectively) in the creating art, then forced by circumstances to adapt to the limitations of gathering and social distancing, so that they only have two choices, namely to maintain their careers as artists by creating individual art. or a group with a limited number of members with "work from home (then have been known with the abbreviation of the WFH)" procedures as the first choice, or leaving their artistic career and looking for a new source of income for their survival as the second choice.

On the other hand, in Yogyakarta and Surakarta, there are still many traditional-based performing arts artists who remain loyal to maintain their professionality existence. This is due to their self-awareness of moral responsibility which inspires them to the importance of maintaining traditional art assets as cultural heritage that must be maintained and preserved. Although it is not easy, creative ideas are always raised in order to attract the attention of consumers or the audience from the original works of performing arts that can be enjoyed directly or virtual, then turned into performing arts that can only be enjoyed virtually or through online media. The internet-based social media is a means of space to display works of art as a substitute for the stage.

Even more unique, the tradition-based artists with their supporting ecosystem who are members of art associations and/or art studios, they focus more on spiritual concepts that are packaged in the form of rituals and prayers. In the process of creating art, it can be said that originally rituals and/or prayers were packaged into the form of performing arts, but now on the contrary, the packaging of performing arts is returned to the form of these rituals and prayers. The packaging of the ritual performance art is a form of expression of reflection on two things: (1) limited minds to solve the best solutions in life due to pressure from the impact of the covid-19 pandemic, and (2) greater awareness to return to concepts the concept of eastern life which is full of spiritualism.

Art products in general, and in particularly performing arts products have an important role as a support for the creative economy. There are the role of art, at least it can be concluded that art has the following functions: (1) as a fulfillment of aesthetic and pleasure needs, (2) as a provider of entertainment, (3) as a symbolic offering, (4) as a physical response provider, (5) as a harmonic norms of community life, (6) as the confirmation of social institutions and religious

ceremonies, (7) as a contribution to the continuity and stability of culture, (8) as a contribution to social integration, (9) as a means of communication. In the relation to creative economy, the arts have an important role in promoting tourism in general, both domestically and internationally (audiences as tourists in this case). In addition, the displays of art products besides attracting the attention of tourists also increase the empowerment of art itself. So, in other words, the rapid progress of tourism development can also elevate the dignity and standard of life of artists or art performers and the entire ecosystem contained in them (Bandem, 2006).

In general, the economy is experienced a serious downturn as a result of the impact of the covid-19, behavior changes in the of performing arts artists trying to make certain efforts. These include documenting works in the form of performances and uploading them to social media virtually either directly or indirectly. This also cannot be maximized, because in the process of making the artwork, there are often obstacles due to gathering restrictions and social distancing.

For artists and culturalists, the results of performing arts that are wrapped in the form of rituals are a representation of self-reflection material that is promoted both for audiences and for artists and/or culturalists themselves. The reflection material is expected to continue to promote the creative economy during the pandemic of the covid-19.

Based on the description, the topic can be formulated as an identification of problems that occur in the form of questions as follows: (1) how is the examples of the minimalist ritual performances in Yogyakarta and Surakarta in the impact of the covid-19 pandemic? and (2) how is the form of self-reflection representation for dealing of the covid-19 pandemic impact?

The movements that carried out by artists which based on traditional performing arts in Yogyakarta and Surakarta-Central Java who package their artistic products into rituals, both those that have been performed or performed virtually or those that are still in the form of ideas, encourage the author to conduct further research on aspects that can be studied as material for self-reflection in the face of the covid-19 pandemic at this time. That is the main motivation in writing this paper. The results of this research are expected to be a reference in the context of developing the sustainability of the existence of traditional performing arts artists.

The benefits of this research can be classified into at least 3 forms of benefits, namely: (1) theoretical benefits, (2) practical benefits, and (3) general benefits. For theoretical benefits, after obtaining the results of a study on ritual performance art as a material for self-reflection on the value of the "adilubung" which is full of spirituality in Yogyakarta and Surakarta-Central Java, the results of this research can be used as a basis or reference in developing further research. For the practical benefit, for artists or performers of tradition-based performing arts and the entire ecosystem in it, the research results obtained can be used as support or moral encouragement and motivation so that they can be used as material for further innovation in creating art based on an eastern identity that is loaded with ritual and spiritual. In addition, this can also be used as a reflection material for further new innovations in order to face the current era of new habits. And for the general benefit, which in this case is intended for connoisseurs and/or audiences, the results of the research obtained can be used as a new discourse as "the medicine of the new culture shock" especially during these times of the covid-19 pandemic, so that have readiness to welcome changes in new habits.

2.METHODS

This study is using a qualitative descriptive research method with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is research that intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perception, motivation, action, and others by description in the form of words and language, in a special natural context and by utilizing various methods. Natural (Moleong, 2005). About the phenomenological approach, it is explained that basically phenomenology studies the structure of consciousness from perception to action. The characteristic of phenomenology is to describe a person's experience, so researchers must focus more on something that appears and comes out of what is believed to be the truth (Kuswarno, 2009).

Meanwhile, for the sake of data collection efforts, the authors took action by involving themselves directly or conducting participant observation techniques. In addition, periodic discussions, interviews, and collection of documentation were also carried out for the purpose of collecting these data.

To analyze this research, of course, we need foundations in the form of theories and frameworks of thought for solving the topic that have been formulated. To facilitate understanding, in this paper the theoretical basis and framework of thinking are divided into two sub-discussions.

2.1. THEORIES

Self-reflection can be defined as a process of deep exploration and meaning regarding ourselves, this includes our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, desires, motivations, and beliefs. By doing self-reflection, we can 'discover' and get to know ourselves better. Reflection is a process of deep exploration. The benefit is that it helps to find new perspectives and insights ("Dyah Larasati in Sadie Day 2020," 2022). In this case, with the existence of the covid-19 pandemic, traditional performing arts artists are reminded of the "east" concepts which originally (before the pandemic) their artwork refers to progress with spectacular forms, then returns to the ritual forms with concepts that are full of spirituality. In addition, with the covid-19 pandemic, traditional performing arts artists can find new perspectives and insights about changing their virtual and minimalist style of appearance.

The process of self-reflection is also called dialectic. Its means, self-reflection is the ratio of the existence acceptance of contradictions on a subject and/or conflict, which then leads to a change which in the end raises a new stage (Soetomo, 2003). Self-reflection is the human ability to introspect and the willingness to learn more about human nature, the purpose and essence of life. By doing self-reflection, humans can gain a better self-understanding in order to solve life's problems (Anantasari, 2022). The downturn of economic that caused by the covid-19 pandemic and large-scale social restrictions or social distancing is a complicated problem that must be faced by traditional performing arts artists. For the sake of survival, both economically and professionally in their art, they are required to find new changes.

Self-reflection also produces a knowledge that is controlled by an interest (the interest of emancipation from domination). Thus, self-reflection is historical, in such a way that it becomes a reflection on the oppressive aspects of the history of reason and the present (present) context. Not only historical, self-reflection is also supra-historical which is a process in which humans are able (because of their nature) to participate in it. This is something that is essential for human life (Soetomo, 2003). Re-contemplation of the concept of "the east" return performing arts which is dominated by ritual forms and have spiritual characteristics and re-presented in the covid-19 pandemic era into minimalist virtual performance forms is a reflection of the artists themselves.

All performing arts activities, both performing arts that packaged in the form of rituals and vice versa, are a unified whole. Performances that are related to art or which borrow elements of art, and something that has been called the term performing arts have different meanings and meanings. Performing art is not only an event, but is an activity of showing an art work which contains ideas and values that are consciously embodied in a symbol to be communicated to the audience. In a broader scope, performing arts is an event that not only shows the work of art, but also has ritual elements in it (Heriyawati, 2016).

Broadly speaking, performing arts have three primary functions, namely as a means of ritual, as a personal expression which is generally in the form of personal entertainment, and as an aesthetic presentation. Based on the primary function as a means of ritual, the audience is the rulers of the world above and below, while humans themselves are more concerned with the values of the ritual ceremony than enjoying its form (Soedarsono, 2002).

Ritual performing arts that have significant characteristics as ritual aspects, namely: (1) a chosen place is needed that is considered sacred, (2) it is necessary to choose the right day for

certain mystical reasons, (3) it requires performers who selected, (4) a set of special offerings is required (Soedarsono, 2002).

The most of traditional performing arts performers or artists and its audience who live both in Yogyakarta and in Surakarta-Central Java are Javanese who are still strong with Javanese mystical and spiritual principles, besides they also have different religious guidelines they profess. In a ritual activity, they do not distinguish belief systems from one another, the important thing is that all refer to forming a community with the same goal which is then called Javanese spiritual culture actors (Endraswara, 2003). For them, the existence of the covid-19 pandemic is considered a "pageblug" (epidemic that come from God's curse or nature due to human error) or even "pralaya" (such as great chaos that demands a kind of sacrifice of many human lives) which is not enough to be fought with medical facilities and infrastructure, but is also based on serious and deep spiritual practice.

2.2. THE MIND FRAME

As a means to facilitate understanding of the framework in writing this research, the framework of thinking is arranged in the form of a chart as follows:

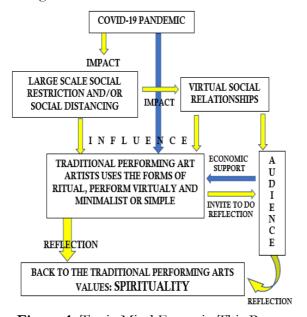


Figure 1. Topic Mind Frame in This Paper

From the chart, it can be seen that large-scale restrictions on social relations have been implemented to suppress the transmission of the covid-19 pandemic. From this, encouraging all social activities (which in this case includes art and cultural activities) can only be done virtually through online social media.

The impact of the pandemic also affected the changes in the ideas of traditional performing arts artists in Yogyakarta and in Surakarta-Central Java to change the behavior, style, and packaging of their art forms. From the beginning (before the pandemic) they referred to the concepts of modernity, "booming", and "spectacular", then return to the concept of "classical east" which is full of rituals and spirituality. The existence of the covid-19 pandemic indirectly seems to invite self-reflection. Strengthening and excavating mystical behavior as a representation of eastern or "Javanese" beliefs is carried out more seriously in dealing with a pandemic or what they are better known as *pageblug* or *pralaya*. The artists and culturalists of 'Jogja and Solo' seem to be reminded of their Javanese spiritual beliefs. From this case, the performing arts that they produce are more focused on spirituality which is packed with "ritual to repel *pageblug*".

The packaging of the artwork is performed virtually through online social media, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and others. Armed with the minimalist packaging, the artists seek funds as a source of living income through donors from audience as donators. Despite this, the artists also try to persuade the audience to do contemplation and self-reflection together in a persuasive way so that they return to enjoying spiritual entertainment.

3. DISCUSSION RESULT

This discussion discusses about the steps for the formation of virtual performing arts as the survival of the arts, specific examples of minimalist ritual performing arts as a form of reflection on spirituality, and forms of self-reflection representation in the face of the pandemic impact.

3.1. "NGAMEN ONLINE" AS ONE OF THE NEW FORMATION

The term of the "ngamen" is referring to the definition of a person or group who sings several repertoires of songs with simple musical instruments in a certain place or walks around from one place to another, with the aim of getting money or funds. The term is then combined or connected with the term "online" which means referring to activities in the virtual world, with online social media as the means. This is what traditional performing arts artists, especially musicians of the *Karawitan* done. Their artworks are uploaded through social media. The term "ngamen online" is often used when uploading performing arts on these social media and during live streaming.



Figure 2. An Example of the "Ngamen Online" Upload on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tY1CvhZzcxE&t=1415s)

Actually, their main goal is only to fulfill economic needs. Therefore, they try to open it through donation channels. However, the problems that they still have to face are at least two things, first, their difficulty in gathering together for practice, considering that they always work collectively, while they are still required to social distancing. Second, the income that they get from donators can be said still far from the target, when compared to their pre-pandemic income with the forms of live performances on the stage.

As a form of self-reflection towards the return of the concept to spirituality, the process of searching for and re-playing songs and the repertoires that contain of prayers, mantras, and hopes of a spiritual nature was further encouraged. Not infrequently, such as the repertoire of certain *gendings* that have existed and both in belief and the history of its creation were related to ritual ceremonies to ward off disease outbreaks become the subject of serious discussion between them and performed (such as the *gending* that entitled "Gadhung Mlathi", and the repertoire of other songs).



Figure 3. The Example of the Reruns of old repertoires which contains elements of spirituality (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2f77I1gczs)

As in the example of the figure, a repertoire of the *gending* that entitled "*Ketawang Barikan*" is often uploaded as a form of representation to persuasively invite the audience to participate in self-reflection on spirituality. The repertoire that mentioned is containing of prayers and hopes for safety in the midst of the pandemic.

3.2. THE MINI RUWATAN IN VIRTUAL WORLD

Basically, the traditional artists and culturalists who are members of the art studios in Yogyakarta and Surakarta-Central Java can be said that they actually do not experience stagnation in their art creations in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic. They only change the style, behavior, and concepts in their creation. Their enthusiasm for work remains constant and even more enthusiastic to seek new creativity for their life and livelihood as a defense during pandemic times. The basis or foundation of their creativity remains, is focusing on the concepts of "the back to nature" and "back to the east" which are full of spirituality.

Ruwatan, that is a ritual type aims to dispel misfortune (in this case also rejects disease outbreaks) which is packaged in the performing art of the wayang kulit, is performed again. Before the covid-19 pandemic existence, the ritual performing art of the Ruwatan was almost never performed. Although Ruwatan is packaged in a simple, minimalist, and virtual way, the efforts of traditional artists to bring out the essences of the concept are very visible as a form of representation of self-reflection on the situation, where the situation requires mental strengthening through spiritual means.

As the example in this case is performing the Ruwatan Wayang Kulit with the title "Semar Anabda Sungsang Bawana Balik." To clarify the background of the wayang kulit - the ruwatan ritual performing art creation that mentioned, it is better to read the transliteration of a direct quote from the background of the work as follows:

The pandemic that came to infect the whole world with the name Corona Virus Disease-19 (Covid-19) has made all components of life people change, starting from the economy, transportation, politics, habits daily activities, to tourism and entertainment. The humans started to get confused, and are in uncertainty when the pandemic will end. Pandemic for Javanese society is known as *pageblug*. Some *pageblug* going on in the land of Java recorded in various ancient manuscripts and often associated with the myth of invisible spirits. Therefore, society Java tries to overcome *pageblug* through spiritual paths to be able to controlling the invisible creatures that cause *pageblug*.

The current era of health science is growing, various research has also been able to categorize the types of the *pageblug* recorded in the ancient manuscripts as plagues caused

by bacteria or viruses. Covid-19 is caused by a virus that is physically invisible by naked eye.

Various strategies, techniques, and policies have been carried out many parties to control or overcome the covid-19 pandemic. Modern era can be seen that covid-19 is categorized as a disease that can treated through a medical approach. However, local wisdom in various countries regions is also trying to overcome the pandemic in terms of non-medical approaches, Java is no exception. Javanese people have known several how to handle *pageblug*, epidemics, or disasters by involving aspects of prayer, spells, *ubarampe*, even magical objects or symbols (heirlooms). One of the rituals that is still being performed and covers all these aspects is a treatment.

Ruwatan consists of various plays, such as the title of the Murwakala, and Sudhamala. In this case, the artist makes a performance work, will but also trying to return the main purpose of the show to traditional patterns which are ritualistic and contain prayers. Creator then interested in making a ruwatan theme related to the pageblug covid-19 with the title "Sêmar Anabda Sungsang Bawana Walik".

Textually, this *Rumatan* text is held in the form of a performance simple shadow puppets. This is related to the existence of a health protocol that must be obeyed, in order to suppress the spread of covid-19. We do not invite many people, and do not use gamelan instruments in large numbers, but still with *ubarampe* or complete offerings of *rumatan*. The performance of this work is carried out in a minimalist manner, but does not eliminate values contained in a *rumatan* play performance (taken from a personal work manuscript text).



Figure 4. The Textbook Cover of the Wayang Kulit Ruwatan with the title "Semar Anabda Sungsang Bawana Balik"

(Private Manuscript)

The encouragement and support of the artists and culturalists from Yogyakarta and Surakarta-Central Java who were involved and/or who later joined themselves under the auspices of the 'Tirta Kelapa Art Space' studio for the realization of the ritual of wayang kulit performances with the play "Semar Anabda Sungsang Bawana Balik" virtually is also an attempt to self-reflection in the situation and conditions that occur.



Figure 5. The situation of the virtual performance of the *Rumatan Wayang Kulit* Ritual with the title: "Semar Anabda Sungsang Bamana Balik" in Tirta Kelapa Art Space Gallery (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG7Z9WzO5vc&t=9251s

Although virtually, the staging event was finally held on a day that is considered sacred too, Kliwon Friday, August 27, 2021. Moreover, the reason for the procurement of the ritual wayang kulit ruwatan that mentioned is because it coincides with the entry of a new time in the Javanese new year, the month of Suro (which is the first month based on the Javanese calendar system) and the calculation of the new windu time as well (i.e. the cycle of time in the Javanese calendar system, 1 windu is equal to 8 years), namely windu Sancaya (known for 4 windu time cycles, namely windu Adi, windu Kuntara, windu Sengara, and Windu Kuntara). For the Javanese people, it is believed that the times in the month of Suro are special times for all activities with a spiritual nuance. Even among the Javanese people think that all prayers and hopes accompanied by mystical and spiritual behaviors can be granted in this month. It was also inspired by the performers of traditional performing arts or artists and cultural observers who mainly live in Yogyakarta and Surakarta-Central Java.

Positive responses from other culturalists and members of other art organizations also provide encouragement, support, and facilities for the spread of the ritual event, even though live streaming and social media. Such as the cultural collectors and lovers of heirloom of the keris who are members of the 'Lar Gangsir' community and the 'Omah Dhuwung' gallery which is located at Tanjung, Wukirsari, Cangkringan sub-district, Sleman district, they will hold a Jamasan Pusaka ritual event (washing or purifying of heirloom kerises) and the resumption of the shadow puppet ritual performance with the play "Semar Anabda Sungsang Bawana Balik" on Monday Kliwon, September 6, 2021.

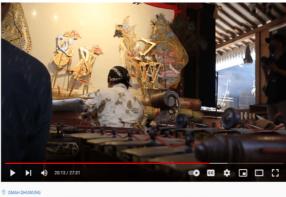


Figure 6. The situation of the virtual performance of the *Ruwatan* and Heirloom Purification in Omah Dhuwung Gallery

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hzauGfgwHY&t=315s)

4. CONCLUSION

Before the existence of the covid-19 pandemic, not a few spiritual values and the authenticity or purity of the journey of rituals as ancestral heritage which are mainly contained either explicitly or implicitly in traditional performing arts have been corroded, extinct, or even lost because only for the sake of "attractiveness." But in the era of the covid-19 pandemic, changes have taken place drastically. Spectacular works of art that are considered to be able to attract many people because they attract attention, seem to have died due to large-scale social restrictions. From this case, many of the performers of the arts or artists and culturalists do self-reflection and introspection by trying to restore rituals and all spiritual values to their original forms, even though many of these things are extinct and or experiencing corrosion.

Excavation of the mystical elements that related to performing arts was also carried out. They try to bring back these things, especially those are closely related to the themes for in these moments. Their main goal is only one, that is: "rituals to dispel or repel this covid-19 pandemic outbreak."

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