

Betawi in the Continuity of Ondel-ondel's Existence through Changes in the Costume Elements

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Keywords: Ondel-ondel, Costume Elements, Semiotic, Roland Barthes.

Abstract: *Ondel-ondel* is a signature giant like Betawi puppet, created by cultural acculturation since decades ago. This piece of art has been through many stages of change from time to time, especially since nationally announce as the icon of the city of Jakarta. The study aims to understand the concepts and ideologies behind the changes of the costume elements of *ondel-ondel*. Roland Barthes semiotic approach applied to read the visual signs and study the concepts or ideologies behind the changes of form and function. The changing process impacted the continuity and enrichment of *ondel-ondel's* meaning related to social, politic, economic and cultural context. The study observed the changing of symbol on *ondel-ondel's* costume elements from time to time, which definitely carry certain meaning in a subtle way. Examining the form, function and format of *ondel-ondel* lead to four periods, which resulted in three concepts or ideologies of rulers behind the changes and usage of *ondel-ondel*.

1 INTRODUCTION

As a culture, Betawi is an intense melting pot, open to acculturation, allowing possibility on creating a negotiation room for dialogue with other cultures, which brought changes and development. Local cultures such as Sunda, Java, Bali Minang, Bugis and foreign ones such as Arabic, Chinese Hindi (India), Netherlands, Portuges were the part of the dialogue (Gunawijaya, 2001). Interestingly, Betawi society expresses a tradition through various rituals, but none of them represent merely just a single culture. There are always multiple culture combined and adjusted according to their culture's character (Purbasari, 2010). Betawi ethnic and culture diversity created *ondel-ondel* as a piece of art influenced by other local and foreign cultures. The human like figure in tall and huge form of *ondel-ondel* is influenced by Balinese Hinduism, Chinese, and Islamic cultures.

Ondel-ondel is a giant doll in 80 by 250 cm sized that exist since 17 century in Banten and called Barongan. It can be traced through W. Fruin Mess's writing (Mees, 1920), who reported about crowd in procession ushering Jayakarta Wijaya Krama princes to celebrate the circumcision of Abdul Mafakhir, 10

years old Banten king. The procession consisted of 300 palace guards and 300 women carrying bulks of valuable gifts such as gold, money and silk, also accompanied by a pair of giant dolls. These giant dolls were assumed as the *ondel-ondel*, which in ancient time were customarily considered as embodiment *danyang* village, repellent of evil. Allegedly, *barongan* was created to function as a repellent when a plaque of infectious diseases affected Betawi society at a Dutch period (Yuwono, 2012). Since Ali Sadikin, former Jakarta Governor's declared *ondel-ondel* as an icon of Jakarta in 70's (Samantha, 2013), *ondel-ondel* underwent significant changes in form and function.

Istiqomah (2013) presented a study about the visual structure of *ondel-ondel*, such as coconut flower, *stangan* (crown), *cukin* sarong, shawl, *kebaya encim*, *sadaria* dan *kain jamblang* generally, without the meaning and detail of its costume elements. Lissandhi (2010) carried out a study on *ondel-ondel* based on Betawi culture changes and society movement (dominated by Muslim), which bring *ondel-ondel* to became one of the conserved cultural identity. As an ancient artefact and sacred object, which derived from Betawi Pinggir's culture, it was an art object considered unfit to Islamic value

(Betawi Kota). *ondel-ondel* went through a long process in culture, social, economic, and politic to be accepted by the whole Betawi. This struggle showed its position as one of the important cultural art in Betawi community development. The social phenomenon occurring within the community were described to explain the culture changes and understand *ondel-ondel* position of the time but did not directly explain the changes on *ondel-ondel* itself, especially the costume elements.

Today, Betawi society can enjoy the traditional art performance in modern presentation. The simple yet attractive form is packaged with festive musical accompaniment; the dense atmosphere then able to attract people's attention. *Ondel-ondel* appearance not only attracts the surrounding community attention, but its revelation can provoke pros and cons. Taking refuge behind the statement of Betawi tradition preservation, to today *ondel-ondel* is increasingly seen as a street art performance collect money by busking. This fact makes Jakarta citizen underestimate *ondel-ondel* because what was once sacred and position as Jakarta's icon then imposed by some community to beg on the street. *Ondel-ondel* went through significant changes in form and function. At a glance, its basic form has not changed, but the costume elements have been through some changes subtly.

This research was conducted by applying semiotic approach to read the phenomenon signs that occurred in Betawi society and the concepts of *ondel-ondel* usage behind the changes of its form and function from time to time. Semiotic came to be the basic reference in mapping *ondel-ondel* costume elements development and changes according to each time periods as generally happened in historical approach, limited from year 1970 to 2015. The research had been done because the *ondel-ondel* function is numerous, also in various forms and events as well. Hopefully this study can give further insight of *ondel-ondel* and Betawi community will be wiser and more thoughtful in treating their traditional culture.

2 METHOD

We strongly encourage authors to use this document for the preparation of the camera-ready. Please follow the instructions closely in order to make the volume look as uniform as possible (Moore and Lopes, 1999).

The research used qualitative methods through interview and documentation to get actual

experience into Betawi life, with historical approach to create the timeline of *ondel-ondel* changes. Then continued to be analyzed using Roland Barthes's semiotic to find the meaning of Betawi's lifestyle and the concept or ideology in *ondel-ondel* by the rulers. System and social relation which build social, behavior, aesthetic and association of *ondel-ondel*'s building elements would be described to uncovered structure present in it and find out the relation. While the *ondel-ondel* become the main object of the research, but social studies on its society is needed to as support to observe the situation and social cultural interaction as an effort to understand the value and symbol system at the time. *Ondel-ondel* is a Betawi traditional art medium that is perceptible by society convention on symbol that had been going on. Culture background of the user influences the context of *ondel-ondel*. Cultural change is dynamic, it happened because of the conflicts between different culture elements.

The research stages as follows:

1. The collecting data connected with the object (*ondel-ondel*) and the subject (ideas and Betawi social-cultural activities).
2. Conducting direct observation, interview, and documentation of Betawi society during 2011-2015. The data source was obtained from Betawi historians and humanists (Sarnadi Adam, Yahya Andi Saputra), *ondel-ondel* craftsmen, visiting Betawi cultural and performance centers (Setu Babakan, Betawi Culture Festival, and Betawi Cultural Organization). Attending folk traditional rituals such as wedding ceremony and *sunatan* (circumcision). Attending folk art performances such as *lenong* (theatre performance) and *ondel-ondel*'s performance. And the society itself. Observing behavior, working process, and other natural phenomena around Betawi neighborhood and people.
3. Every changes or transformation of *ondel-ondel* analyzed and structured by using semiotic analysis to see the relation between element, culture, and society.

The relation of metaphor process and semiotic in the above context is used to gather the representation concept of Betawi culture in *ondel-ondel*.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to be Jakarta's icon, which must be accepted by the entire Betawi people, *ondel-ondel* underwent many changes. Frightening and horror form must be humanized. Magical and sacred elements must be removed. As a result, *ondel-ondel* becomes more enjoyable as a street performing art and decoration. There were 3 periods, which was based on the *ondel-ondel* costume elements change through time. Post Animism and Dynamism period, *ondel-ondel*'s no longer function as barrier reinforcement, but a greeter and entertainer in popular party events. This time branded as the Personification period (Purbasari, 2015).

The *ondel-ondel* development did not just stop at the personification period. When Azhari Bendlawi (Head of Coordination of Da'wah Islam) served as the head of Jakarta Culture Department in the 80's, he proclaimed the use of *cukin* (sarong in the neck) as an alternate decoration to substitute sling for *ondel-ondel* male and matching sarong tied at the waist, under the shirt. The combination of *cukin* and belt buckle resembles a *demang* suit, Pitung outfit and *pesantren* (student boarding) clothing. The changes lead to interpretation that *ondel-ondel* had been Islamized, religious and *soleh*. This period named as Religion period (Purbasari, 2015).

Next, *ondel-ondel* enjoys an era of freedom, free to be creative in form, free for expression in public and parade. *Ondel-ondel* no longer appears in a pair but in a horde. They were not longer had the same size and form, but become varied. *Ondel-ondel* is not only in 3 dimensions form but also 2, printed into fabric media as clothes, scarf, and hanging wall, etc. Their appearance is more humanly, with friendly smile, eye shadow, lipstick, dimples, earing and so forth. The *ondel-ondel* life was full of commissions for many interests, unlimited to culture but also politics, economic and social. This period is called the Commercial period (Purbasari, 2015).

According to Sarnadi Adam and Yahya Andi Saputra (historians and artists from Betawi Culture Organization), Betawi has its own colors (red, green, yellow, blue, orange, white and black) that appeared in every traditional ceremony or festivals, which give performing stage for *ondel-ondel* (Saputra, 2013).

The structure of its building elements in Personification period had its own appearance. At that time, Jakarta was in development and searching for identity of DKI Jakarta as capitol city through local government policy. This policy created Betawi

human icon through *ondel-ondel* that express simplicity, populist and authoritative human.

Development in manufacturing technology also touches *ondel-ondel*, replacing old and heavier wood with alternative material: fiber. Beside lightness, its superior qualities are easier and faster to formed. In female costume, major changes happened. From formerly wearing *Kurung* dress, *ondel-ondel*'s costume switched to adaptation of *Kebaya* similar to the one worn by contestant of *Abang Nene Jakarta* beauty pageant, which had bright colors combination. Contrasted color shawl and Betawi Batik *Jamblang* sarong bottom in analogous color tone with the *Kebaya* become a staple part of the costume. The color combination provided traditional ethnic aesthetics, in line with fashion trend and textile industry technology of the era. The color combination presented impression of earthy colors. *Ondel-ondel* was in the Development ideology cycle.

Later on the central and local government intervene in constructing *ondel-ondel* to seize power over the religious stand. Bloody incidents occurred at the time, which involved the authority and the religious group regarding the topic, led to the release of local government policies on cultural sector. Through this policy, *ondel-ondel* is presented as the icon of Jakarta. The government initiated the application of *Cukin* accessory derived from Muslim daily attire. The provision of *Cukin* associated as Islamic symbol and *ondel-ondel* circumcision, gave birth to populer impression: Betawi people is *soleh* (god-fearing) and *islami*. The islamization of *ondel-ondel* shifted the meaning of its costume elements, including on color which tend towards islamic. *Ondel-ondel* lost track of its origin and created different interpretation from previously, then it was claimed as a original and traditional culture product of Betawi. The *ondel-ondel* colors combination in Religion Ideology displays the harmonic aesthetics, using calm colors and tendency to align colors pattern. The concept of *ondel-ondel* in personification through islamic model was called Religion Ideology.

During Islamic through Commercial period, *Ondel-ondel*'s costume elements dominated by economic motive. Craftmen are on commissioned thus making them strongly control by the consumer. The *ondel-ondel* custome elements lost its sanctity, breaking the relationship between Betawi human and the meaning of their life. It became very festive in various shapes, sizes and colors in high contrast combination, lacking the spirit, making way for the emergence of modern and cosmopolitan Betawi

human. The concept of using ondel-ondel and its costume elements in that time is the concept of Market (commercial) ideology cycle.

The ondel-ondel function has changed, once as a cultural instrument, and today as a tourism instrument, such as ceremony entertainer (wedding and circumcision), greeters, building decoration, souvenir or cake decoration, and often also used to busking. Today, ondel-ondel has been accepted by the whole Betawi communities.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The *ondel-ondel* costume elements (form and colors), function and meaning transformation were changes brought by authoritative power which was absorbed in modernity, and tends to abandon, what have become a tradition in culture. Modernity in relation to development changed the Betawi "face" from traditional to modern, characterized by the changes of forms and colors in the *ondel-ondel* costume elements. The shifting, adding, changing, and eliminating the *ondel-ondel* costume elements is a reflection on how loose Betawi culture medium, both physical (place) and non-physical (knowledge about *ondel-ondel*).

The shifting and changing in *ondel-ondel* costume elements and function from time to time, illustrated the dynamic (flexibility) and blending of Betawi community in defining their culture. The dynamics of Betawi society shown from their tolerance and consistency in taking care of their own culture. Based on the *ondel-ondel* development stages, it can be said that the Betawi community with all the high culture acculturation in social, economic, politics and technology are changing too fast and as a community is still trying to grow to show its identity.

Up to present, the existence of *ondel-ondel* has been through a lot of tragedy and drama. The changes of costume elements through times, is a prove of its long existence, by preserving significant classic part and adapting other communities influences for its sustainability. The sustainability of *ondel-ondel* means the sustainability of Betawi community; therefore the preservation of *ondel-ondel* is imperative, for it is a part of identity and life of Betawi. It is not only a traditional Betawi piece of art but also a medium or arena of culture constructed by the authority.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge that the present research is based on dissertation to fulfil requirement for doctorate program conducted at Indonesia Art Institute, Yogyakarta. It is an honour to have Prof. M. Dwi Marianto, Ph.D, Prof. Agus Burhan, M.Hum as promotor and co-promotor. The author wishes to convey deep thanks and gratitude to Dr. ST. Sunardi for the encouragement and being the inspiration.

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