

RONGGENG: EMBODIED FEMININITY AND SEXUALITY IN *SANG PENARI* (2011)

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Abstract

This research is aimed at revealing how the femininity and sexuality are embodied in ronggeng's body as depicted in Isfansyah's *Sang Penari* (2011). As the cultural narratives is designed differently by the society, the intersection of gender and sexuality has a great impact on body. Therefore, this research will use intersectionality approach to reveal how the embodiment of femininity in this body as well as the sexuality paradoxically affirms the process of othering the body. Through Yuval-Davis theory, I argue that ronggeng's body experienced the ambivalence notion of gender ideology as mother of collectivity. Ronggeng's body is believed as the mother of figure in which all hopes and goodness are placed in her body. Yet, the shifting regime views this body through different lenses as depicted in this film. The results reveal that women's body is sexualized under heteronormativity, in which it relates to the gender oppression. The oppression is manifested into the ambivalence experienced by Ronggeng. In Old Order Era, the cultural narratives posit *Ronggeng*'s body as the symbol of fertility. Ronggeng is the dance performed in harvest time and is believed to spread blessings and fertility in relation with reproduction. On the other hand, the culture and society castrated the body by controlling her to be infertile. Further, the shifting regime let the *Ronggeng* body experience sexual slander for being labelled as the member of Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Yet, the shifting discourse in New Order Era related *Ronggeng* with prostitution. All are the manifestation of sexual politics of regimes in Indonesia.

Key words: ronggeng, intersectionality, femininity, sexuality, sexual slander

Introduction

The phenomenon of the dancer's body as the arena of power exercise is already familiar for Indonesian society. Hence, the cultural narrative that is constructed towards ronggeng positioned the body as the target of the practice of power in a political context. In this case, the body has become an important agenda along human history and culture. Based on the concept that humans are embodied subjects, the body becomes an arena where differences in gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class are formed and manifested (Benson in Woodward, 2002: 128). This statement underlines the intersection of gender and sexuality, and it is fundamentally essential in embodiment practice of gender ideology. Through women's body, the shifting gender ideology of Indonesian regimes as well as the exercise of power can be clearly identified.

The practice of power towards the ronggeng body is also articulated through a film entitled *Sang Penari* (2011) produced by Ifa Isfansyah in 2011. This film, with the setting of Old Order and the New Order era, was inspired by the novel of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* by Ahmad Tohari. Previously, in 1983 this novel had been filmed under the title *Darah dan Mahkota Ronggeng*, directed by Yasman Yazid. Interestingly, the film

Sang Penari (2011) depicts the complexity of body politics by relating it to the events of 1965. Subjugating the body by relating it to the 1965 discourse is intentionally constructed to arouse trauma and fear in the community. It is still clear in the collective memory of the Indonesian nation that the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) is the communal enemy of the Indonesian nation. The PKI was constructed by the authorities as a group that was about to stage a coup against the legitimate Indonesian government. The PKI and all the mass organizations affiliated with it were associated as inhuman organizations. This association led the public to conclude that being part of the PKI or being related to the PKI was a fatal mistake that rise to a curse and justification for the torture or murder of this PKI member (S. Wieringa, 2019: 103). The labelling of the PKI is part of control mechanism towards the Indonesian people's body.

The Old Order and New Order eras with patriarchal cultures positioned women as subjects who experienced ambivalence. Yuval-Davis (2008: 56-58) stated that the ambivalence places women as a symbol of collective unity, bearers of honor, and even reasons for national or ethnic projects. This begins with a female construction that is usually placed with a mother figure symbolizing the spirit of collectivity. Further, Yuval-Davis (2008: 56) stated that female figures are usually associated with mothers symbolizing the spirit of collectivity. Thus, the woman's body will become the mother of collectivity, a mother figure in which all hopes, and goodness are placed in her body. At this point, women both individually and collectively will be attached with a burden of representation since women are constructed as symbols of collectivity. On the other hand, women are excluded from collectivity. This is manifested by positioning them as the object. Further, the cultural narratives also used the collective wisdom by relating it to the intersection of gender and sexuality to reproduce the commonsense.

The intersectionality of femininity and heteronormativity places the female body as a site of struggle that must fit the normative gender and sexuality. The interdependence between gender and sexuality lets the women's bodies as the target, and they must be controlled because of their sexuality which endanger the stability of the order. Intersectionality becomes a space to dismantle how these elements become axes in body politics. Crenshaw (in Nash & Nash, 2008: 3) states that intersectionality is a meeting point that dismantles marginalized and excluded subjects, when identity is formed through the intersection of race, gender, class and sexuality. Moreover, the intersection also has a great impact on the sexual slander experienced by the gendered body. At this point, Wieringa and Katjasungkana (2019: 101-103) stated that in this modern era Indonesia experienced two moral panic that leads to the scapegoating the Gerwani and the LGBT community. Therefore, the sexual slander views them through pornographic gaze.

The film will be observed in detail through close reading technique. The data are taken by capturing the screen on the scene related to issues of femininity and sexuality. Data are categorized and unnecessary data will be reduced, while important data will be analyzed. The data obtained then related to how the cultural narrative of the regime in Indonesia ambivalently positions ronggeng's body regarding issues of gender and sexuality. The last is making a conclusion. In this last step, the researcher concludes by identifying the intersection of gender, sexuality, and the dancer's body.

Research that raises the issue of gender in *Sang Penari* (2011) has been conducted by Mundi Rahayu. In her research, she questioned how the dancers' bodies become the agent of resistance. Eventhough the previous research discussed more about the representation of woman, the details about how the body becomes the arena has not been addressed in details. Therefore, this study will examine how the cultural narratives posits

the dancers' bodies ambivalently in the Old and New Order regimes. Further, this research also discusses the control mechanism toward this body which leads to othering by labelling the ronggeng's body as the member of communist Party (PKI).

Result And Discussion

In gender relation, women are attached with the “burden of representation” which positioned them in an ambivalent position. This ambivalence is also experienced by Srintil (the ronggeng dancer) as depicted in *Sang Penari* (2011). Through her body, it can be seen that the ambivalence on the one hand reifies Srintil as a subject that represents the spirit of collectivity, but on the other hand places her to submit to the patriarchal order. As coined by Yuval-Davis (2008: 57-58), the ambivalence reifies women by idealizing them as the mother of the community (the embodiment of mother of collectivity mother), but it also positioned woman in the process of othering. Women becomes the symbol of guardians of collectivity, society and the nation. Thus, this ambivalence, on the one hand positions women as a symbol of a social collectivity, while on the other hand it positioned woman as the “other”. Ronggeng's body is sexualized by the heterosexual society in which they also mystified her body as a symbol of fertility.

In *Sang Penari* (2011), ronggeng's body becomes an arena for the embodiment of femininity and sexuality in heteronormative relationships. This is in line with the Old Order and New Order eras that constructed heterosexuality as the legal sexuality in Indonesia. One of the markers of the discourse on heteronormative sexuality in this film is the relationship between Rasmus and Srintil. As depicted in figure 21, Rasmus and Srintil are revealing the heterosexual relationship. Through internal focalization, this scene depicts how the cultural domination operated by society. In the intradiegetic voice that implies a conversation between Rasmus and Srintil, Rasmus wants Srintil to stop being ronggeng so they can unite legally. The union of them is a final portrait of the wishful thinking of a heterosexual relationship which usually manifested in a marriage. However, without denying his origins as the daughter of a *bongkre* seller who poisoned the villagers, Srintil prefers to devote herself to his ancestors as a ronggeng. Indeed, the cultural narratives constructed that being a ronggeng means Srintil cannot have a legal relation with any person because she is the embodied symbol of collectivity or known as the mother of collectivity.



Figure 21. Heterosexual relation of Rasmus and Srintil

In *Sang Penari* (2011), women's bodies are sexualized in such heterosexual relationship in order to satisfy men's desires. As portrayed in figure 22, Srintil as ronggeng is visualized when she was dancing and is surrounded by men. Even Srintil is depicted in sexual relation with some men in this film. However, even though Srintil had relationships with man on her journey as a ronggeng dancer, she could not be bound into a legal relationship. This situation highlighted how sexuality becomes the axis of oppression experienced by Srintil because she is objectified to satisfy male desires. As coined by MacKinnon's (1982: 19) that sexuality is a form of power. Therefore, heterosexuality as a social desire constitutes the domination of male sexuality and female sexual submission. At this point, it can be interpreted that heterosexuality becomes a site for culture to exercise power over women's bodies.

The fact shows that sexualization of women's bodies which has been proliferated in the cultural narratives is practiced for the sake of dominant discourse. Indeed, this practice involves gender oppression. The implication of this practice then positioned women's bodies as socially and culturally constructed within the context of sexuality. As revealed in this film, it can be underlined that the shifting regime in Indonesia also has an impact on shifting the meaning of the ronggeng body related to the gender ideology adopted by a regime. However, women who are attached with the burden of representation, experience ambivalence as the mother of collectivity. In ronggeng's terminology, they are mystified as a symbol of fertility on which all blessings are embodied on their body. However, it is also practiced under heteronormativity. This is in line with Edward's opinion (2004: 32) that sexuality is part of the reproduction of men's rights in sexual patriarchy. Therefore, various rules applied to women as a form of protecting women will always be linked to sexuality. Indeed, this indirectly presents the female body as the object of male sexual desire.



Figure 22 Srintil is dancing, surrounded by male.

Further, ronggeng as a symbol of sexuality is constructed to satisfy male fantasies. Both the costumes and dance movements of Ronggeng show that the sexuality of the body gives sexual satisfaction to society as represented in figure 22. Indeed, it clearly opened the male bias. Further, Srintil as a ronggeng is glorified as both the symbol and object of sexuality in heterosexual relations. In this sense, Srintil is valuable in his relationship as a male's sexual object. Alexander (2011: 376) stated that women are positioned as the subordinate, therefore they are considered valuable only in relation to men for their sexual reproduction capacity and capability. This notion is continuously reproduced as an effort to perpetuate male's domination through gender relations which are practiced in heteronormative relationships.

While in the performance, ronggeng movement that explores the chest and hips is closely associated with fertility. It highlighted the practice of constructing male's fantasy. As stated by Lysloff (2002: 4-14). a female ronggeng dancer with opened costumes on her shoulders and a provocative movement of her hips will look tempting. It is related to the image of the ronggeng movement which is very sensual in male's fantasies. Yet, this image is interpreted as women's obedience to masculinity. Therefore, it cannot be denied that this film was also constructed through male gaze in visualizing Ronggeng. While Srintil is dancing, the camera's eyes will not be separated from highlighting the erotic body parts. Likewise, the male audience are more dominant in the ronggeng performance although there were several female audiences in this film.

The existence of women experiencing ambivalence is a cultural reduction of the position of women, but actually women's sexuality is also controlled by the society. In *Sang Penari* (2011), this effort can also be seen by castrating the fertility of ronggeng. This castration is done through physical action by massaging Srintil's uterus in order to make it infertile. It underlined the practice of controlling the symbol of sexuality. It is supposed to be tamed as the body could possibly endanger stability, in which it is castrated and is being sterilized. From the above explanation it can be highlighted that in the context of ronggeng, the cultural narrative built in the Old Order era shows ambivalence. This ambivalence reveals the experience of ronggeng on the one hand it reaffirms ronggeng as a symbol of sexuality but on the other hand it places ronggeng as a sexual object by castrating the sexuality. Thus, it cannot be denied that cultural control is basically an objectification of women's sexuality as well as a form of gender oppression. Everything is constructed for the interests of the dominant structure by manipulating it for the existence of a ronggeng. Indeed, it can be underlined that the sexual politics in the Old Order era which oppressed women was also practiced by controlling the symbol of sexuality. This is in line with Evan's statement (in Wieringa, 2002: 249) that if women's sexuality is controlled, it is believed that this will stimulate the development of social and moral order. Whereas for those who are not restrained or not being controlled, women will endanger society and cause chaos. It is highlighted the nuance of fear that continuously reproduced so that women are always controlled.

During the New Order era, the condition of how the power perceive ronggeng is completely different. Women's body still becomes the arena for power exercise but on different way. Biopower was practiced against the ronggeng's body because it began to be considered dangerous to the national order. Ronggeng is believed as a bitch since the cultural narratives closely associated her with prostitutes. Thus, in the shifting regimes from the Old Order into early new Order, Srintil experienced sexual slander. She is labelled as a member of Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Consequently, she was abjected by the nation.

It is still clear in the collective memory of the Indonesian about the 1965 genocide that every individual who was considered as PKI would be arrested, imprisoned, persecuted, and exiled from society. This is a manifestation of body politics as coined by Mirzoeff (2010: 55) that in the practice of body politics involves the justification and rationalization of violence, in which the resistance body against the state is considered as capital crime. Srintil experienced sexual slander by being labeled a PKI member. She was considered against the state for supporting the PKI party. Basically, it was not only related to the reason that the artist was close to the PKI but also her embodied sexuality made her to be the target of subjugation. Furthermore, the intersection of gender and sexuality positions Srintil as a dangerous body because ronggeng's body is then associated with prostitution.

As depicted in figure 23, Srintil is taken from a detention camp and forced to serve sexually. She was sold to the rich man by the apparatuses, but she did not get any amount of money for his body. Therefore, Srintil was arrested and tortured, but in this case, it is not only the physical torture but also sexual torture.



Figure 23. Srintil was arrested and tortured in a Camp.

In this film, the submission of female body by New Order regime is practiced through a control mechanism such as the biopolitics. This is also manifested in government regulations for ronggeng dancers which also involve the state apparatus. In its development, biopolitical practices on dancers' bodies were carried out through the institutionalization of rules by the New Order regime such as the creation of policies known as coaching. Larasati (2013: 21), explained that the existence of dancers and dances in the New Order era was structurally regulated by the state through the Ministry of Culture with one of its systems called coaching. This terminology shows an indication that art construction is becoming better or more feasible and is usually applied to folk arts to conform to New Order standards. Further, Lysloff (2018: 14), stated that *lengger* or *ronggeng* must be Pancasila in ideology by participating in the New Order cultural ideology class and being given an identity card to be able to perform in the show. Therefore, it is not surprising that *Lengger* in the New Order era was increasingly marginalized because the dancers were considered not to fit with the virtuous cultural orientation of the New Order. In some cases, some folk dances such as *ronggeng* or *lengger* in Banyumas must be "subdued" so that they conform to the values of the New Order. New Order norms that refer to the Pancasila ideology require that *ronggeng* performances should be in line with the Pancasila ideology. Formerly, *ronggeng* is seen as primitive because its movements are too sensual so that it invites lust. The sexuality of the *ronggeng* dancer is considered dangerous for other men and women. For men, *ronggeng* is considered to destroy men's morale and undermine masculine power because they are unable to resist temptation. On the other hand, for women the existence of *ronggeng* is considered to disturb the harmony of their household. Thus, it clearly can be seen how the shifting regime positioned *ronggeng*. In the Old Order era, *ronggeng* sexuality was not considered to be dangerous, instead it became the foundation of collective hopes for fertility and social harmony. This notion became much different when the New Order era positioned *ronggeng's* body as a threat that possibly destroys the society's order.

Furthermore, *ronggeng* dancers were associated with dangerous and immoral women in new Order era. Thus, Srintil is visualized that she is no longer has desire for Rasus at the end of this film. As depicted in figure 24, Srintil avoided Rasus while Rasus just stared at her at their meeting at the Dawuhan market in 1977. The cultural narrative

constructed from this scene is to support the New Order era that perceive ronggeng as a symbol of sexuality and associated with prostitution. Moreover, as Srintil was labelled as the member of PKI, and Rasus as the state apparatus, their relationship is barely prohibited.



Figure 24. Srintil was running away from Rasus

Another important notion of sexuality in the New Order era is the construction of heterosexuality as the only legal sexuality in Indonesia. This regime, which was very dominant with its masculinity, constructed the relationship between men and women legally in the institution of marriage. Marriage is an institution that legitimizes the relationship between women and men under heteronormativity is the only relationship that is legitimized by the state. Thus, it is stated in the Marriage Law No.1 of 1974, which defines marriage as a physical and spiritual bond between a man and a woman to form a family. While Srintil as a ronggeng dancer is positioned outside the order, in which it leads her being so far from the marriage institution. In new Order era, Ronggeng which is associated with prostitution is a woman who will not be chosen to be a spouse, especially for a state official such as Rasus. This phenomena underlines the cultural narratives that positioned being women is such a difficult thing. Women are increasingly facing a lot of pressure because they are often demanded to be “proper” to be legally chosen as male partners. Infact, these various cultural narratives that required women’s obedience are the constructions of the Indonesian sexual politics. Therefore, through the ronggeng’s body it can be underlined that Indonesian sexual politics in Old Order and New Order Era cannot be separated from the gender oppression experienced by women’s bodies.

Conclusion

The intersection between gender and sexuality becomes a very strong notion to dominate the dancer’s body as revealed in *Sang Penari (2011)*. However, there are fundamental differences in sexuality articulated in the Old and New Order in perceiving woman’s body. In the Old Order and the New Order, sexuality which was regulated by state power used heteronormativity as the legal sexuality of the nation. As articulated in this film, the sexuality exposed by these two regimes cannot be separated from the heterosexual relationship. Heterosexuality in this case is also associated with normative gender roles that define a person’s identity. This connection shows how Indonesia positioned itself as a privileged nation, which means that sexuality in the New Order era was constructed in ideology as one country, one gender, and one sexuality supported by social, political, and cultural institutions that construct and benefit it (Mayer, 2002: 5).

The stability of the ideology of the nation is established to support the privilege right of the master narrative. Therefore, the dominant discourse is continuously reproduced for the sake of ruling regime which leads to the stability power of masculinity.

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