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JURNAL PENDIDIKAN BAHASA DAN SASTRA

INDONESIAN THEATER 1985-1995:

A PERSPECTIVE OF DESCRIPTION PROCESSES

SOCIAL CHANGE AND VALUE

Mohamad Zaelani

**Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. HAMKA (UHAMKA) Jakarta
Jalan Tanah Merdeka, Kp. Rambutan, Pasar Rebo, East Jakarta 13830
e-mail:** mohamad.zaelani@uhamka.ac.id

Abstract

This research seeks to depict the history of Indonesian theater development from 1985 to 1995. This period is deliberately chosen because at that time it is seen that New Order power reached the top of its consolidation. Is there correlation between theater as a part of the reflection of society's expression and the repressive-authoritarian situation of the New Order government? With the approach of sociology of art, during that period, theater in Indonesia reflectedthe changes in society socially and in terms of values. One of these changes was the collapse of the conception of human wholeness (in terms of flesh and blood) in theater in Indonesia, because humans weremerely the object of the state power that tended to be authoritarian.

Keywords: Indonesian theater 1985-1995, social changes and values, silent theater, theater ideas.

INTRODUCTION

A prominent feature of the New Order political constellation was the political life situation characterized by relatively organized management or "political conflict management". This fact immediately gainsits significant situation, if we want to trace the related events in handling political conflicts that occurred in society at that time. In the period of 1985-

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1995, this problemhad managed to become the central issue again with the rise of public protests against bureaucratic policy. Student demonstrations, workers' demonstrations, May 1995 statements by artists and cultural observers, public protests over the Social Assistance Donations Program (SDSB), a legalized gambling in the form of lottery for sports fundraising, were real examples of public reaction to the bureaucratic policy.

However, those reactive attitudes from the community seemed to end in anticlimax again due to to the bureaucratic handling of these conflicts, the arrest of 21 students who protested, the cancellation of SIUPP (Surat Izin Usaha Penerbitan Pers - Press Publication Business Permit) against three leading media --*Tempo* Magazine, *Editor* Magazine, and *Detik* Tabloid--were real examples of such political conflict management. As a result of this reality, the

hegemony of the ruler to maintain the status quo felt really strong. The people power, polyphonic in its nature, were helpless in facing the flow of bureaucratic monophonic power. Mass media which were expected to build the balance of information distribution, was more subject to capitalistic laws and on the shadow of SIUPP cancellation.

The tendency of the national mass media in the more capitalistic New Order era, as well as the inevitability of the global currents of culture also brought direct implication of political policy emphasizing on the management of political conflict. Such a model of developmental politics according to Mochtar Mas'oed (1989), found its format in two forms of strategic pattern of development. First, juridical control of the world of the press in the form of political licensing, requiring them to have STT (Surat Tanda Terbit -

Publication Permit) for publication with limited scale and SIUPP (Press Publication Business Permit) for mass media of general and business nature. Secondly, maximizing theeconomic role of the press by requiring all of mass media with SIUPP to form of "Persoraan Terbatas" (Limited Liability Company) or PT (and automatically) encouraged large investors to engage in press publication or mass media.

The involvement of large capital owners forced the national pressto shift role from political press to the industrial press which was the biological child of the capitalistic press. A discussion organized by Lembaga Studi Pers dan Pembangunan (LSPP) which presented Dr. David T. Hill from Murdoch University, Australia, in Jakarta on February 4, 1995, came to the conclusion that in the last two decades, the mass media role in Indonesia had experienced a dramatic shift, from the political press to the industrial press. This shift was also marked by capital owners racing to invest in the mass media sector, both print and electronic media. And with this shift, the idealistic role of the mass media had also changed.

The mass media capitalistic situation, supported by an increasingly well established and sophisticated base of production infrastructure, had led to a "mass media formed culture." In this circumstance, the mass media transformed its image into a "factory" or "industry" of culture which was verypersuasive and suggestive. (James E. Comb and Dan Nimmo 1994: 290). We are in a world of diversity, packaged, advertised, sold and consumed all at once. Infrastructure base support - in the form of information technology --was actually paved towards

the road, which in turn triggered the birth of the global information revolution.

The global revolution of informatics was not only characterized by quantitative social change in the form of an increasing number of proprietary information tools such as the number of telephone, television, computer, or parabola. Or increase the number of hours of broadcast and television channel selection, the number of television viewers and subscribers of e-mail networks. But if marked as a qualitative change --as marking one meaningful era – it came down to the destruction of two things most sacredfor modern society: humanity and reality. Human identity and reality faded away --though it must be understood within the boundaries of the hypothesis-- because both of these had undergone a "fictive" or "imaginary" shifting due to the polarization created by language/information/discourse (Heriyanto, 1985: 4). Comprehension of "human" and "reality" became very relative, because its meaning was more determined by its discourse that was getting increasingly plural.

Various events and series of social changes and values abovewere more likely to be relevant to the theater world than any other genre of art. The various theater ideas and events emergingon that period (from 1985-1995) presumably became medium for those concerns. These theatrical ideas and eventshad intensified the situation more than a decade after getting their socialization forums, especially through mass media and several theater meetings. Based on the facts above, the researcher tries to follow the traces and the direction of Indonesian theater development from 1985-1995 and

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tries to map it in a wider socio-cultural perspective.

THEATER AND SOCIAL REALITY: BINARIUM THEORY

Sapardi Djoko Damono (1995: 2) is correct, that important works of art can be born in any socio-political conditions. *Gitanjali* was written by Rabindranath Tagore in a country still in the grip of the colonizer. Wole Soyinka dramas were written in the third world which are full of political and social turmoil in Nigeria. In addition, works of art remain to be made even though they are incapable of improving the life of their creators, and such example was the life of Chairil Anwar. But on the other hand, there is still an artist who is able to control the quality of his works even though he's got everything life has to offer, like the author John Grisham from America.

But in other realities, artwork (including theater) is not always free from its factual background. Arnold Hauser, therefore, in his book *The Sociology of Art* (1982: 109) writes that all media of artistic expression –theater included-- always have national characteristics. No artist can afford to use a universal expression medium (language of art) by underestimating the expression mediums that apply nationally, although it is possible for the artist to interact with cultures within radius beyond the boundaries of national culture.

Arnold Hauser further explains that the language of art (this term is widely understood) is the result of a dialectical process which departs from a national idiom (referring to a particular territory) and makes its journey towards universal work, the national features are being preserved, or according to the term of Budi Darma: experiencing crystallization.

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Shakespeare, Recine and a number of other world caliber artists, all creating their works in the spirit of their national language. Therefore, Hauser goes on to say, that without adequate knowledge of the cultural sense in which a work of art was created, it would be difficult to fully understand it.

From this perspective, there appears to be a binary or rather binarium relationship between the work of art (including theater) and the social reality behind it. In relation to the concept of the binary, A. Teeuw (in Daniel Dhakidae, 1994: 4-5) proposes a theory, the river theory. In this river theory, the relationship between social reality and art is described as a binary concept: the reality in the upper stream (*bovenstroomsewekelijkheid*) and reality in the lower stream (*bovenstroomsewekelijkheid*). The reality in society-like politics, culture, development, ideology, and so on as the "upper stream" - gets its aesthetic image in the artwork, which in turn also builds reality as the reality of the "lower stream."

It has been explained above how social changes and values that occurred in Indonesian society during the period of 1985-1995, both arising from the existing socio-political conditions and changes in social values that caused by the globalization of information.The shift generated by the global wave of information is not only a quantitative social change but also to the root of the value itself, in the form of the breakdown of two important pillars of modern ideology, "human" and "reality". The above problems have become something that arecontinuously growing in society and have become a reality of the mentioned streams from the concept of the Indonesian theater binary of 1985-1995.

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The collapse of the modern human identity due to the discourse relativity that explains its existence has earned its aesthetic image in Indonesian theater in the form of "the loss of human figures" (in the senseof psychology) in various performances of the period. Therefore, Radhar Panca Dahana is correct that the Indonesian modern theater in that period faced ontological demands to first explain the existence and the absence of human being that enables the establishment of a role on the stage (Radhar Panca Dahana, "Mencari Manusia di Teater Indonesia" ("Searching for Man in Indonesian Theater"), *Kompas*, May 29, 1994). In the trends of theater period 0f 1985-1995, that "human wholeness" no longer had the dominant image. Productions from Teater Sae, Teater Kubur, and many of their followers, clearly showed this tendency.

Radhar Panca Dahana suggests both Teater Sae and Teater Kubur obviously no longer brought human in their everyday senses. Teater Sae no longer represented the human figure in the social, economic, political, or cultural nature. Humans who have reached the paradox point of the linearity of their self: a person ironing inside a basin, a man wearing a bra, or a housewife carrying a gun. And they also seemed to disarm humanity from the meaning of its history, Teater Kubur featured figures: man in a garbage hat, personified them as concrete pole, power pole, and so on.

The reality of the world (the concept of reality) wasconsidered collapsing because the real reality is things, events, or other things that werebeing materialized. (Heryanto: 1995: 4). It existed because it had already existed or happened, and its existence did not require any

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representation through any medium, including language, information, or discourse. Any thought of his identity, remained something far from his "wholeness," maybe even a folly. Does not every thought meansa "choice", and every "choice" containsa "highlight" and it means a "deletion".

The reality that was no longer intact, the reality that experienced this blurring had more or less influenced the creation of Indonesian theater narratives (part of theater) period of 1985-1995. The text was no longer a plot requirement, but fragments of events or occurrences. Narrative (story) experienceda "melting", which according to Afrizal Malna (*Kompas*, July 3, 1994), transforms itself into "news". The theater had turned into some kind of "microphone": giving announcements because the actors did not speak within the framework of dialogue,

but rather read a kind of "notice" to the audience. Both dialogue and dialectics between actors in a single show are "relative," or even did not happen at all. The theaters using these models were quite numerous, especially the theaters that were born in the late 1980s and the early half of the 1990s.

The rather repressive sociopolitical condition practiced by the New Order government got its pronunciation in the theater precisely in the form of rephrase, which wasother form of wordings, though some ofthem conveyed it in a more vulgar form. The form of rephrase can be in the form of a reproduction of "Sufism" of theater language, forming as "silent theater".

Silent theater is a theater that is no longer uses words. Even if there is more conversation, they are "groans" and "roars" only. On the other hand, this

repressive form of socio-political conditions gave birth to "insinuating" form of theaters, theaters full of parodistsand satirical dialogues, such as the Teater Gandrik in Yogyakarta and Teater Koma in Jakarta. In fact, it was not uncommon to present scenes of life silliness, a kind of parody of human ignorance --the most perfect creature.

This parodies form of staging, for example, could be seen in Teater Koma performances directed by N. Riantiarno. One example was the presentation of the *Konglomerat Burisrawa* staged at Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM), Jakarta, March 23 - April 1, 1990.The *Konglomerat Burisrawa* is a figure whose "breakfast" (every morning) is listening to reports of the development of his fortune, the emerging of new factories, the process of swallowing of small factories, monopoly of goods production and marketing. The next morning waking, lying in a bathtub made of 24 carat of pure gold. Then the next routine is very personal, which is masturbation.

These powerful theatrical forms could also be seen in the works of Emha Ainun Nadjib. In his poetry dramas or poetry theatrics, such as *Lautan Jilbab, Bani Khidr*, or *Perahu Retak* and the musical of *Pak Kanjeng*, Cak Nun - so he is usually called - chose a form of expression which explores cultural symbols (especially those originating from Islamic values), slightly peppered with social criticism as the central of the show. Emha Ainun Nadjib – who might seem as well to mark the decay of the modern human identity-- had altered the position of the characters in the theater of "human in the flesh and blood" into non-human figures, the "ideas" or "notion". From here, Cak Nun is like to

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"humanize the idea" as a character in a theater performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND SOME POSSIBILITY OF NEW MARKERS

From the above description, it can be concluded that the Indonesian theater period of1985-1995 reflects the condition of social culture at that time, namely the peak period of New Order political power. The interplay of art (theater) with today's religiosity, characterized by this endless dialectic or theater and reality, has spawned a new genre of theater, essentially marking the collapse of the cosmic conception of human wholeness in the theater. Repressive power and capitalistic culture place humans as mere objects. Finally, the human conception of theatrical performances does not depict the "whole" human figure, who is "soulless"

and "fleshy". Finally, a theater genre appears to exhibit a mere physical motion (the silent theater), or otherwise theater with insinuation, but the conversation does not portray human characters, but rather as the presentation of ideas, information, a kind of mere announcement (theater of ideas). From here, it is obvious that the theater in the period of 1985-1995 does describe the situation of a society with the changing of its values system. And the change of values does not only affect the forms of theater narratives, but affects also the broader "values system" in the art world. This shift is also in line with the fading of old values toward the orientation of new values (postmodernism?).

Below are some things that seem to experience a shift in values. First, the myth of "autonomization" forms of art and "originality" of art creation that is getting shaky. Autonomy of art fades away,

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because the world of art (including theater) is not free of value. Art as a "text" is not an independent text, born in history. The text is not something "single" any text must be related to other texts that helps it. Thus, each text must undergo an intertextuality and be bound to its context. In fact, romantic texts also proved to be plural texts, because in them there are Hindu texts and Indian traditions. Picasso's Cubism apparently has an intertextuality relationship with the art of African traditional sculpture. The theater creed of Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty contains many traditional Balinese theater texts and ritual ceremonies of the Indian tribe (Ikranegara, 1994: 64). With the shaky form of autonomy art (theater) also means the originality art world (theater) also experiences a lot of fading.

Secondly, the boundaries relativity of the fact form (nonfiction) with the form of fiction. The endless dialectic between story and reality, the world of fairy tales and a real world, history and delusion, ultimately diminish this form of fact and fiction. Stories are reality; on the contrary, reality is a solely story. What seems to be like in fairy tales turns out to be true and happen; and the fact that appear really happening is in fact fairy tale. Fantasy is history and history is delusion. Therefore, Aart van Zoest (1990: 75-77) is correct that the question of "truth" in fact and fiction is not more than a "myth". People have always assumed that the facts are true, whereas fiction is a fiction. Is that right? Apparently, a fact contains many fiction, it is evident that many people are still looking for "the truth behind the news". But, on the contrary, a fiction also contains many facts, it is evident that much of the work of fiction is capable of creating conventions in society.

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Third, the blurring boundaries between serious art and popular art, the blurring of these two boundaries is more due to a shift in the values of truth. According to poststructuralists and postmodernists, in the knowledge system there is a path of paralogy (a term loaned from Jean Francois Lyotard), that the system of knowledge is no longer based on the principle of right and wrong, but to allow everything to be open. Thus, it is not appropriate to compare one work of art with another, since each has its own view of truth, which is incommensurable. Therefore, popular art has its own "universe" of truth. Similarly with serious artwork. They can't be compared again.

Fourth, the possibility of demystifying works of art. The fourth possibility can not be separated from the third possibility above. Only in this case is more characterized by the dissolution of the work of art on a matter of a day-to-day nature. The boundaries between the high art and the folk art are fading. The work of art is ultimately nothing more than other everyday items, which may be modified, codified, sold in bulk, but at the same time be glorified.

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