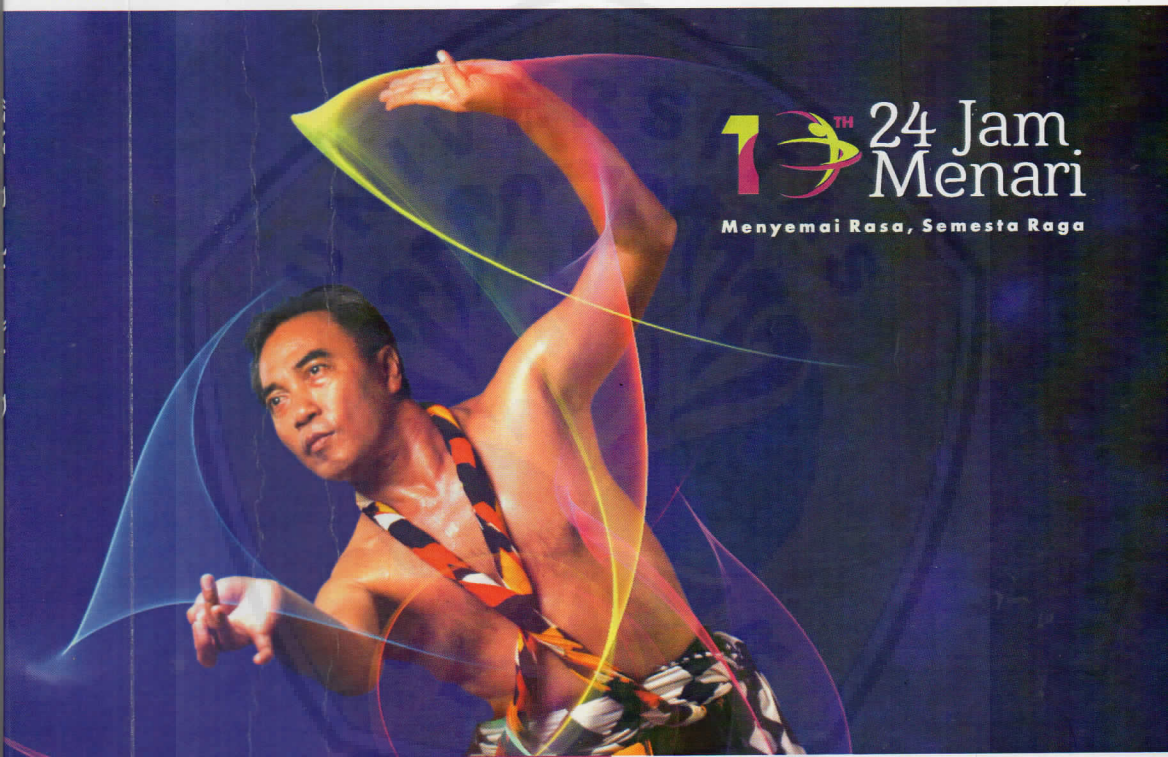


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P R O C E E D I N G

“We Feeling” in Dance:
A Manifest of Intercultural Values



**10TH 24 Jam
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PUSAT STUDI TARI DUNIA
(CENTER FOR WORLD DANCE STUDIES)
ISI SURAKARTA

Wahyu Santoso Prabowo
Shahanum Mohd. Shah
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PERSPECTIVE REVIEWS
OF SOME PAPERS

PROCEEDING

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OPERA JAWA: A STORY ABOUT JAVANESE WOMAN' RESISTANCE

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Abstract

Opera Jawa (2006) is a movie by Garin Nugroho. It is a dance movie that tries to combine musical, dance, and art literacy in a cinematographically frame. *Opera Jawa* tells about Javanese people's life. Narratives about Javanese women manifested through songs in Javanese musical instruments' (*gamelan*) accompaniment which is flowing, plaintive and expressive. *Opera Jawa's* story was inspired by the epic Ramayana tale which revealing the triangular relationship between Rama, Shinta and Ravana. This free adaptation brings up Siti, a woman and wife of the Javanese family, which tells about the nature of women through the symbols of vitality, power, and greed. One of the most prominent subjects in this movie is the rice-steamer. This kitchen utensil is used to cook rice, which implies about the viability of the Javanese. Rice-steamer on Siti's hand becomes a means of resistance against the nature of women. Siti became the role models of supremacy value, loyalty, as well as suffering. Siti, as pictured at the end of the movie, explains that the two men who want to preserve her are the real example of a man who dominated by lust of power, greed, ownership, and violence. This movie is a portrayal of man who failed to interpret the sense of humanity.

Keywords: *resistance, women, supremacy.*

Introduction

Opera Jawa (2006) with international title *Requiem from java* produced by Company Crowned Hope and Set Movie production and directed by Garin Nugroho is a movie narrated through dance, song, and installation work in full

metaphoric text. *Opera Jawa* tells a story about the life of a married couple, Setio (Martinus Miroto) and Siti (Artika Sari Devi). Both of them are dancers of Ramayana played as Rama and Shita. After they got married, they stopped dancing and then relied on their pottery-making business. The businesses of entrepreneurs and small traders in that village are threatened with bankruptcy because of the social inequality between the rich and the poor, including businesses Jawa created by Setio.

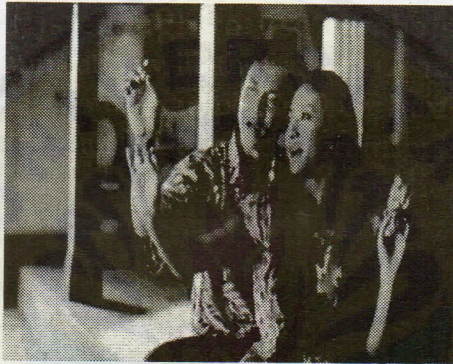


Figure 1. Siti and Setio, the protagonist character on the *Opera Jawa* movie
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie



Figure 2. Ludiro, the antagonist character on the *Opera Jawa* movie
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

Financial problem raised a gap between Setio and Siti's relationship. Setio who often left their house for work then caused Siti felt lack of the touch of affection from Setio, his husband. Finally, Ludiro (Eko Supriyanto), a rich yet high-handed butcher, came and wish to seize Siti from Setio. Siti's devotion then was being tested, in one side she loves her husband but in the other side her wish cannot be prevented anymore.



Figure 3. Scene of Siti's anxiety on her domestical area
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

Siti's anxiety is the power of this movie. Siti is a middle-class Javanese woman living in a village. In Javanese practical context, a woman is a figure trying to always make everything in order, so for this reason too, a woman should be willing to be ordered. Siti is an example of a Javanese wife, who has a power in domestic area; manage the family and also help husband in economic stuff (Christina S. Handayani dan Ardhian Novianto, 2004: 7).

Siti's character in *Opera Jawa* at least has a contradiction with the Javanese practical context explained above. This will be very interesting to discuss on the reason why *Opera Jawa* placed Siti's character out of Javanese woman context that is willing to be ordered.

Watching *Opera Jawa* movie, in fact, is not served by the story based on Ramayana on particular; however Garin Nugroho made *Opera Jawa* a free interpretation from the story of Shinta's abduction by Rahwana to actualize the story of love triangle in the most recent context. Besides trying to comprehend the story, viewers are also invited to communicate through the metaphors and symbols appeared in the movie through the settings and properties within each its scene. As Joseph M Boggs described that movie makers don't need to create attitude and sense associated in the movie, but it is enough to use symbols as a potency of communication with the viewers (Asrul Sani, Terj, 1992: 41). There are some examples in *Opera Jawa* including the setting from some installation works from Jogja's artists; sculptures, stretch of red cloth, dozens of meat hung, and so forth. It is also including steamers surrounding Siti. Are the settings and properties presented in *Opera Jawa* able to strengthen the meaning in this movie?

Loyalty and Resistance

The story of *Opera Jawa* is started with an insert of a glass painting of Dewi Shinta facing Ramawijaya and Laksmana, complete with its Javanese script above. Still in that insert, text describing this movie's version started with the story of Shinta's abduction which is often performed in Javanese dance and Javanese shadow puppets show. This is the story of Rama and Rahwana. Both love Dewi Shinta and fight for her love. In the end of the story, Dewi Shinta is being tested by jumping into fire, proving her love and sanctity to Rama.

The story of Javanese shadow puppets may trigger Garin Nugroho's interest to make movie. As it is told that Indonesian movie history centered in Java Island cannot be separated from the shadow puppet's growth as a popular public entertainment and full of dynamic in its meeting with other art of entertainment (Garin Nugroho dan Dyna Herlina S, 2013: 15).

The next insert is a black and white picture of Setio and Siti wearing Ramayana costume, then Setio's best friend acted by Jecko Siompo wearing Hanuman costume, and Ludiro wearing Rahwana costume. This insert is also introducing the characters.

This movie is opened when Setio and Siti calmly sat cross-legged in the center of crowd in a market, wondered to know their future life with forecaster by fortune teller using pork liver as the medium. Slamet Gundoro, a famous puppeteer who had received Prince Claus Award, played a role as a narrator using mix traditional Tegal-accented songs said "there is love in pork liver, life united as one. This is a story of Dewi Shinta. A heart contested by all men around the globe. This has happened from a long time ago, from Prophet Adam to Adam Smith. Everyone seek their own truth. Whereas the truth in every human is not necessarily true. You were right, I am not necessarily right according to the others".



Figure 4. The pictorial of Siti's loyalty towards her husband
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

The story goes on, Requiem from Java tells three persons in a village in Java. They are Setio and Siti, ex Rama and Shinta dancers in a group of human puppets, then worked as bankrupted earthenware sellers. In that village also live

Ludiro, a Don Juan, and an owner of slaughterhouse, who fond of shadow puppet show and really admires the character of Rahwana. Secretly, Ludiro fell in love with Siti and then determined to posses Siti from Setio, and also to own the whole economics of the village. That was when the triangle love happened as the story in Ramayana. However, the story of Setio and Ludiro became more extreme. The village is full of human with greedy expression and really like violence, there were so many mass clashes, or even worst, the village became a mass grave.

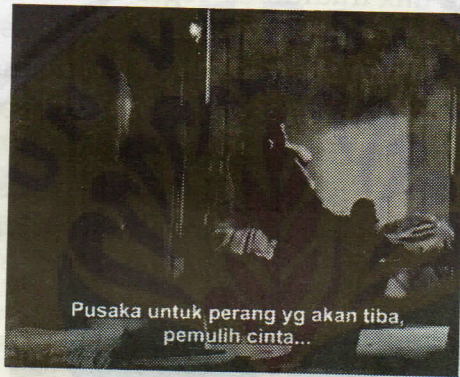


Figure 5. the presence of two man on Siti's life
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

Finally, Siti realizes that there were two men in her life wanted to possess her. Then there would be a presence of lust, greed, violence and also powerlessness. By realizing that, Siti then take a decisive point that they were not Rama, Shinta, and Rahwana, they were just a human being failed to interpret humanity gloriously and causing violence, fanaticism, and more negative things.

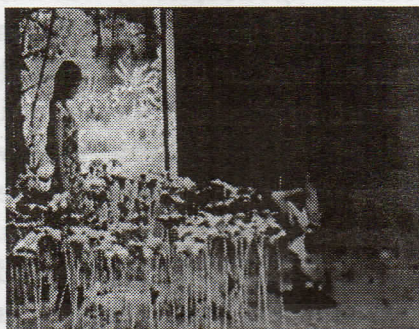


Figure 6. Siti deceived by Ludiro's seduction
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

As the story of Shinta Obong (Burnt Shinta) in Ramayana epic, *Opera Jawa* displays Siti as central character describing character of loyalty, sincerity, not breaking any promises or cheating, a struggling and also gift, to keep love and promise together. In the story of Shinta Obong, Shinta was abducted by Rahwana and brought to the land of Alengka. Rahwana's seductions were pouring to soften Shinta's heart then she was willing to become Rahwana's wife. Shinta was not responding, struggling to keep her body untouched by Rahwana and swore to end her life if Rahwana touches her body skin.



Figure 7. Setio's anger towards his wife, Siti
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

Shinta's effort to keep her sanctity was not encountered by the love from Rama to Shinta. Jealousy made Rama's faith on Shinta trembling down. Then finally Rama sent Hanoman to meet Shinta and place a ring in a finger of Shinta. Shinta was still a virgin in the story. However, because of the jealousy of Rama, Shinta finally ended her life by throwing herself into the fire.

The figure of Siti in *Opera Jawa*, in a very different way, was not able to maintain the loyalty for her husband, Setio. Being left often by her husband and struggling in family's financial problem made Siti persuaded by Ludiro's persuasion. Ideal concept held firmly by Javanese people that a woman is a figure of making everything in order and willing to be ordered was not attributed to Siti anymore.



Figure 8. Scene showing Siti's effort being a modern woman
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

Siti finally became a character of realistic woman. Her existence was supported by a various kind of needs valued by economic level. Siti secretly keeps her own desire, and be oscillated between fulfilling her own desire and fulfilling her loyal promise to her husband. The woman's role as *kanca wingking* (friend in the back- a follower) held by Setio in the scene when Setio tries to "shape" his wife with the mud like a pottery he made. That is possibly a metaphor about how a

woman, in this case: a wife, is being formed as the husbands want and sometimes only as a place to release their desire. This strengthens that man's ego is still strong in Javanese society.

Siti tried to get out of this patron with awareness that Siti is the only one who decides a value of greatness, loyalty, and also suffer. Siti, as pictured at the end of the movie, explains that the two men who want to preserve her are the real example of a man who dominated by lust of power, greed, ownership, and violence.

Communicating trough symbol

Artika Sari Devi actually is not a dancer, but she is able to successfully display the figure of Siti. Siti is village women, but she has sharp eyes. Slowly movements flowing as in the classical Javanese dance groove but kept incredible strength. The depiction of Siti, as a Javanese woman who soft by heart but hinted firmness in her soul, are so pervasive in Artika Sari Devi's acting.

It is inversely captured in the figure of Setio as an analogy character of Rama. Setio is lack of confidence. Pictured as a weak man. It is perhaps the director's wish that this character is to counterbalance the power of Siti in playing the character as a housekeeper as well as a single player of storyline.

If observed carefully, *Opera Jawa* does not portray a real home life. All of it seemed absurd, especially the presence of Ludiro's role and others. This is because *Opera Jawa* does not present a verbal dialogue; rather, all wrapped neatly in such Javanese songs serving and are supported by Java installation works of several artists, namely Nindityo Adipurnomo, Agus Suwage, S. Teddy D., Hendro Suseno, Titarubi Sunaryo and Entang Wiharso.

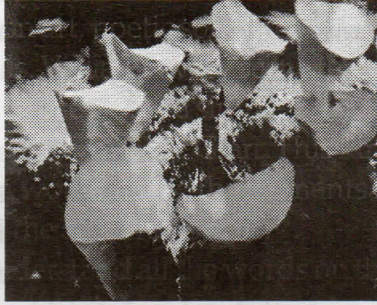


Figure 9. Siti being surrounded by steamer
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie



Figure 10. Setting showing its artistry with decoration full of symbols
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie



Figure 11. Installation showing the power and oppression
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

Installation works as setting as well as property in the movie is at least able to support the message in every scene. For example, the hanging corpse does not look vulgar rather

than properties that resemble human bodies. However, the message remains clear. Barbarities are around us. Similarly, as the heads were scattered elsewhere and red fabric that extends to the entire of village, these also portray barbarity.



Figure 12. Installation showing the greedy and powerful figures
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

The essence of installation art is the spatial experience of the audience along with the work itself. In *Opera Jawa*, the installation arts migrate to the two-dimensional medium, then, although it can be seen that Siti tempted by hundreds of candles are like fireflies, or attracted by a tangle of red fabric that seemed passionate, or trapped in a maze of coconut husks, still the audiences hit the screen. Experience was lost directly and only able to watch the screen framing.

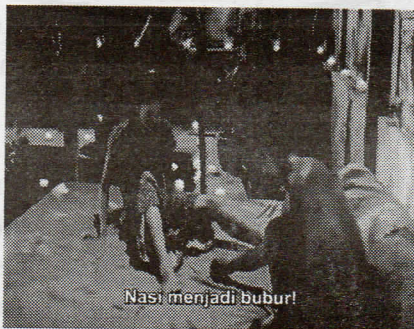


Figure 13. Siti is trapped on luxuriousness and beauty
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

Collaboration between dance movement, property and installation art, poetic song, are all merged into a movie full of symbols. Visually, every scene that appeared feels good to watch, because it uses a simple yet efficient cinematographic approach by Teoh Eng Gian. This kind of cinematographic approach would allow the elements in the image to appear and spoil the audience's eyes.

To understand all the words on this movie is not an easy task. Setting and property usage also added by a wide range of media installation art is something else and it also requires further reflection. Nonetheless, the movie is already guiding the audience with theme of love, fidelity and sexual desire which are displayed clearly on the surface. For example, it is shown in the scene when Ludiro persuade Siti with hundreds of candles that led to the rebound effort against sexual desire, and Siti's effort to not to have an affair. Setio is jealous and it is shown by the burning of red fabric. This makes Ludiro feels incredible sadness and anger that he wanted to return to his mother's womb.

Opera Jawa treasures a lot of meaning, especially regarding to social images of today's Javanese society. Meanwhile, social inequality is so pronounced: Ludiro oppresses all who do not obey him and collides with the authorities. The scene is depicted by people, who, though dressed as a dancer but hatted soldiers. Then with questionable sincerity, Setio unites opposition against the injustice of it. Tragically, the more visible value is precisely the fate of the poor who are not able to determine their own destiny.

Powerful dance choreography, a popular story, backed by strong acting, and music plays an important role. Like a funny atmosphere women workers danced to mock "less menly" Setio or when the desire of Siti surges in the dance using a rice steamer, persuasion tempted Ludiro to hide behind the lyrics of a song that tells the pleasure Telo

(cassava). On another occasion, a gripping impression was felt through the illegal movement of the “barong” dancers, and the scene in the maze trapping coconut husk.

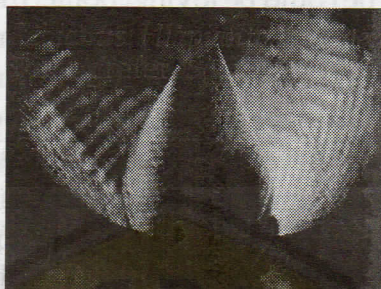


Figure 14. The actual function of steamer
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

The property which often appears in the movie is the steamer, a bamboo cone-shaped utensils used for cooking rice. Siti does not seem to be separated from the steamer and in some dance scenes, Siti even plays with it. Through steamer, Garin Nugroho to communicate to the audience that it can symbolize either women as well men, depending on the way Siti plays with it. Steamer bases with holes, meaning that it is a symbol of woman, while its sharp ends symbolize men.

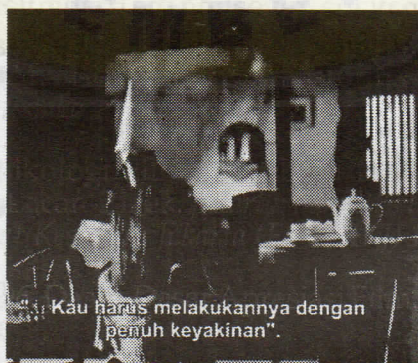


Figure 15. Siti plays and dances with the steamer
Screenshot of *Opera Jawa* movie

At other times, Siti plays the steamer by biting its side, and consequently the steamer covering her face and it looks as if Siti acts like an animal. It reveals that either women or men are mortal, he could be loving, polite, thoughtful but at a time when the ego or lust permeate the human soul, he can act like animals, even worst, exceed animal ferocity.

Human easily behave on behalf of grandeur for the sake of the interests yet they forget the honestisty. Two women who become the victims of such grandeur in this movie is Siti and Sukesesi (Retno Maruti), Ludiro's mother. Siti looks miserable because of her love triangle, while Sukesesi, who loves Ludiro, suffers from being helpless to prevent his son's anger. *Opera Jawa* is a grim narrative about violence and savagery robed majesty. Unfortunately, it is a thruthful self reflection. "Banyumasan Blues", which pitched sadness and bitterness of the poor who bear the punishment of the love of his characters, are still resounding.

Conclusion

Opera Jawa is a dance movie that combines musical, dance, and art literacy in a cinematographical frame. *Opera Jawa* tells about human life that glorifies both love and suffering of Javanese people. *Opera Jawa's* story was inspired by the epic Ramayana, revealing the triangular relationship between Rama, Shinta and Ravana. Siti is a Javanese woman who tells about the nature of women through the symbols of life, love, power, and greed. Steamer, as a household kitchen utensils used to cook rice, implies about the viability of the Javanese. In the hands of Siti, steamer becomes a tool of resistance against nature. Siti, as pictured at the end of the movie, explains that the two men who want to preserve her are the real example of a man who dominated by lust of power, greed, ownership, and violence. This movie is a portrayal of man who failed to interpret the sense of humanity.

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Regionalism has been a serious international issue after the end of the cold war. It is a body of idea promoting an identified geographical or social space as the regional project. It is the presence of the conscious construction of an identity that represents one specific region. "We Feeling" is often identified as a basic need to build the phases of regionalism as what has happened with the development of European Union (EU). Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has overcome the phase through the declaration of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) supported by its three pillars; economic, politics, and socio-cultural.

Referring to the socio cultural pillars, dance, as one form of arts, has the opportunity to play important roles. UNESCO stated that dance is an inseparable part of human's culture. Dance is not only physically beautiful rhythmic motion, performed and conducted by dancers or groups of dancer on a stage and being appreciated by their audience. However, dance, as a matter of fact, is flourishing due to human needs to find harmony with the environment to maintain the continuity of life. The social believe and community relations rooted in the dance can be explored to elaborate an intercultural practice both through its foundations of motion and music. This kind of exploration will propel our understanding about the cultural foundations of "we feeling". Better understanding of this matter will play strategic role in the preparation towards people connection as the important feature of socio cultural pillar, which in the end along with economic and political pillars will strengthening the future of AEC.

Study on the manifestation of intercultural values in the dance can be achieved through the perspective of the dance and its music from all over the world. In the context of AEC, it is important to study how intercultural practice has happened in the dance movement and music of dances found in Southeast Asian countries. Intercultural exchange with other countries that have historical connection such as USA, Europe, China, Japan, and South Korea also proven to be valuable to enrich the understanding.



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