Photography as visual documentation of Topeng Losari dance culture of Sanggar Purwa Kencana

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Abstract. Indonesia is a country with diverse ethnic groups that has a big potential in exploring its culture and turning it into a valuable asset. However, the young generation does not fully explore this potential and prioritize computerization and technology instead, as they consider those things a bigger asset for the country. This research aims to help preserve Indonesia’s local traditions and culture, and reintroducing them to the young generation in the hope of attracting their interest. Losari Topeng dance as one of Indonesia’s local cultural heritages will be the main topic explored in this research. It will be done by using visual documentation approach, in the form of photography that has a power on social media and on the internet, both the biggest and the fastest source in spreading information that is distance-free and can reach to a wide audience. Author concludes that photography will be the effective approach to document and visualize this mask dance heritage of the Indonesian culture as a way to preserve it.

1. Introduction

Mask dance is an Indonesian traditional dance, a form of local cultural art. One of the most famous mask dances is from Cirebon in West Java. It is called Topeng dance as the dancer wears a mask or topeng in Indonesian. Long before it entered Cirebon, Topeng dance had been growing since the 10–16\textsuperscript{th} century in East Java, during the ruling of Prabu Amiluhur or Prabu Panji Dewa in Jenggala \cite{10}.

Topeng dance came into Cirebon and blended with the local art. In Wali Songo era, the spreading of Islam was centered in Cirebon. Syekh Syarif Hidayatullah, or known as Sunan Gunungjati, and Sunan Kalijaga used Topeng dance to spread the religion. It was performed in the Cirebon palace, along with Wayang Kulit, Gamelan Renteng, Brai, Angklung, Reog and Berokan, all are the forms of Indonesian traditional art.

In its development in general public, Cirebon Topeng dance ended up having its own unique and specific arrangement and presentation, known as Rahwana/Kelana, Tumenggung, Rumyang, Samba, and Panji Topeng dance, with the dancer in each dance wearing a mask covering their face. There are five types of topeng used in the dance, known as Panca Wanda (means five wandas or five faces). These five faces are Rahwana, Tumenggung, Rumyang, Samba, and Panji \cite{11}.

Cirebon Topeng dance is often considered only as a traditional art that has been performed by generations to generations. However, it has some mystical elements to it too, which makes it even more interesting. Cirebon Topeng dance continued to grow and adjusted itself to the local art of the areas near Cirebon, one of them was the local art in Losari, Central Java. In the Losari version, there
are still elements of Cirebon Topeng dance that exist, like the various types of topeng used by the dancer and the use of the Panca Riti (five stories) keris, that will later be reviewed in this research.

One of the local art studios (sanggar) that still tries to preserve Losari Topeng dance is Sanggar Purwa Kencana (Dewi Sawitri), founded by Mimi Dewi, and now run by her granddaughter, Noor Anani, who is also the direct descendant of Losari Topeng dance creator, Panembahan Losari.

2. Method
The research and creation process will use the Visual Ethnography method. According to Boaz N.T. and Wolfe’s research [1], Biological Anthropology, ethnography in this research is linked to researching community, ethnic group, and their characteristics. Visual ethnography can be simply translated to the result of an anthropologic analysis that eventually produces an ethnography. The whole ethnography will then be visualized, for the simple reason of it being experienced by future viewers.

The visual documentation will only be some sort of effort to visualize the ethnography, and will not affect or meddle with Topeng dance. It will use a media that is efficient to record visually, not only the dance movements, but also the culture of the people living near the sanggar. The results will then be shared to a broader range of observers, in accordance with the authors’ competence in photography.

2.1 Problem formulation
There has not been much data about Losari Topeng dance, and it shows from the minimal information people can find about it, especially in the visual form. This is one the reasons why this research is done. The other reason is that Sanggar Purwa Kencana is an art studio run by the direct descendant of the creator of the dance, so the preservation of this dance is done poorly. Losari Topeng dance preservation will need focus and support from the local community and government.

The visual documentation aims to give a positive impact in the preservation of Losari Topeng dance and to enrich the art, especially the one linked to performance and dance photography. People both in and out of the artistic world will be able to tell the difference between characteristics of one type of dance and the other by looking at the movements captured by the camera.

By using the result of photography that can freeze the moment of the object, the writers hope that observers can explore the visual of Losari Topeng dance better. They can look at the photos on social media, the most practical place to browse data in today’s digital era where anyone can easily post photos and other data on the internet, out to be seen by everyone in the world [2].

3. Results and Discussions
3.1. History of Losari Topeng dance
Topeng dance, Losari-style, has a long history. It was born within a generation who believed in animism and dynamism. The dance was created by Panembahan Losari, or known as Prince Losari Angkawijaya, around 400 years ago. The Prince was the descendant of Kasultanan (kingdom) Cirebon in West Java. He lived an ascetic lifestyle, away from the kingdom, and he traveled to Losari Kidul village, in Losari, Central Java. He died in Losari.

The dance was created to help spread Islam. The ones performing Losari Topeng dance now are the seventh descendants of the first people who performed it in the past. They were called Dalang Topeng Losari. The plot of Losari Topeng dance, called babakan, is mainly about the characterization of the Panji story, different from other Topeng dances that focus on the philosophical aspect of the development of human characters.

Losari Topeng dance also has other differences with the other Topeng dances, like in its background, characters, choreography, clothing style, wanda kedok (characterization), music composition, and presentation. The interesting part about the choreography in Losari Topeng dance is the movements called Galeuyong, Pasang Naga Seser, and Gantung Sikil. In Gantung Sikil movement, the dancer is require to show the sole of their foot to the side, making them look similar to a statue of
A form of Losari Topeng dance, Klana Topeng dance, takes its main character, a puppet character, Prabu Klana Bandopati, from Jaka Buntek story, mentioned in the story of Panji. The character is a wild beast with a dark red face. The dance is a dance with strong, powerful, and rough characterization, so the dancer needs a good stamina to perform it. The other reason for a dancer to have a good stamina is because Klana Topeng dance is so dynamic and it emphasizes on the power intensity and the understanding of the character. Klana Bandopati, with its dark red face and stared eyes, portrays the nature of human that is so full of anger and arrogant. The dance carries a message for people that watch it, that they should not imitate those bad characteristics in their life [14].

Klana Bandopati is more than something about life and characterization. It is more about the good and the bad, portrayed by the white and red mask, and about the ritual presented by the two energies from the good and bad characters, Panji that means soul and Klana that means body.

3.2. The History of Sanggar Purwa Kencana in the age of Nani Dewi Sawitri
Dalang, or the main dancer in Losari Topeng dance has to be the firstborn of the descendants of Panembahan Losari, or Angkawijaya, like his first child, first grandchild, and so on. The first generation was dalang Durman, and then the title was passed onto the next generation, dalang Daring, then dalang Sukanta, and then dalang Sumitra. Dalang Sumitra had two daughters, Mimi Sawitri and Mimi Dewi, both also Losari Topeng dancers [13].

Mimi Sawitri first started Sanggar Purwa Kencana of Losari Topeng dance in Astanalanggar, West Java in 1984. Mimi Dewi then continued the legacy. Mimi Dewi was not the firstborn of Mimi Sawitri, only her sister, but Mimi Sawitri’s children did not want to perform the Topeng dance, so the dalang title was temporarily owned by her. The title was then finally passed on to Mimi Sawitri’s first grandchild, Noor Anani M. Irman, who is now the sole dalang of Losari Topeng dance and the manager of Sanggar Purwa Kencana. She is better known as Nani Dewi Sawitri.

Until now, Sanggar Purwa Kencana still tries to keep the legacy of Losari Topeng dance alive. It keeps improving the dance inherited by the Losari Prince. The sanggar has been performing across Indonesia and they have also performed in around 10 countries [12].

3.3. Ciri-ciri Tari Topeng Losari
Some characteristics of Losari Topeng dance make it difference than other Topeng dances, one of them is the use of batik. Losari Topeng dance does not use batik with Mega Mendung pattern, like other West Javanese Topeng dances do, but it uses batik with Liris or Parang pattern that come from Central Java.

It cannot be just anyone that is able to perform Losari Topeng dance, but the direct firstborn of the descendants of Panembahan Losari. The dancer should meet some requirements and go through some rituals. The topeng used in the dance also has to be the mask that is passed through generations. The rituals that the dancer has to go through are mutih (a type of fast that requires one to only eat white rice and drink water), rawit fast (a type of fast that has to be broken by eating a bird’s eye chili), patih geni fast (a no-eating and no-sleeping fast), wuwungan fast (a type of fast where the one fasting has to stay in a room with no visitor allowed), and sedawuh fast (a half-day fast). These rituals have to be done so the dance performance can go smoothly.

In Losari Topeng dance, one act can be performed by different dancers, but in other Topeng dance in Cirebon, a dancer can perform up to five different acts. Losari Topeng dance tells stories, while the other Cirebon Topeng dance focus more on the characters. Every movement of Losari Topeng dance is not only a movement but also a prayer. Every movement has a different meaning of the prayer. The dancer is not allowed to have their back to the box containing the topeng while they are dancing.

In Cirebon Topeng dance, the Panji topeng is worn in the beginning of the dance, but in Losari Topeng dance, it is worn at the end of the dance, because Panji topeng was considered the one having the most important character.
3.4. The choosing of photography as a visual media of the creation process

Photography will be used as a visual media that records the visual ethnography process. It will record the process in a still technique, and the still result, photographs, will be printed. While taking the photos, the camera’s shutter speed will play an important role to record the main movements of the dance that can be its representation. Some of the movements will be photographed with flash that helps isolate the main object, either the dancer, or the surrounding. Some other movements will be photographed with a slow shutter speed technique that can help the future viewers feel the ambience made from the dance choreography.

The writers chose photography as a media to record Losari Topeng dance based on the consideration that the recording of the dance would be easier to be observed if it was ‘frozen’. Viewers might be able to observe the dance by using the ‘frozen’ visual details presented in the photographs. The writers also quoted that, “Our memories are short and our lives are full. Having a thoughtful record to look back at in the future—whether it be a written document, a photograph, or a personal artifact—helps us mark our progress through time” [3].

By considering the media excellence and the types of colour produced, both film and digital photography will be used at the same time to get results that complement each other well. The photographs will also be taken in both colour and black and white. Photographs taken in black and white will be able to tell a different story than the ones taken in colour, even when the object in the photographs is the same object. This can help produce varied photographs, taken using different techniques [4].

The speed of the photo-taking process will be adjusted to the type of dance movements, ambience, and surrounding of the sanggar. The role of a photographer in this process is limited only to the setting of the use of added artificial light as fill light and composition settings, including in it are the camera angles setting, and the positioning of the main and supporting objects [5]. Photographer will only be able to document the dance ritual, and they will not interfere in the dance while it is being performed.

4. Conclusion

Based on the data obtained and the observation done by the writers, Losari Topeng dance is a traditional art that is worth preserving as a part of Indonesia’s identity. The combination of West and Central Javanese culture has made Losari Topeng dance a type of dance that is so unique and different from other Topeng dances from other areas in Java.

It would be such a shame if Indonesians did not do their best to preserve Losari Topeng dance. The government has been doing an effort to recognize the improving Losari Topeng dance, that is now being more widely known, but the effort is just limited to facilitating dance practices and organizing dance performances. An effort with a long-term solution will be needed to preserve Losari Topeng dance as Indonesia’s local heritage and so the world can start to notice Indonesia’s diverse culture. Photography will play a big part in preserving the dance. It is an excellent visual artwork, able to enter social media and can be a creative way to keep Losari Topeng dance alive and growing bigger in Indonesian culture.

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**Acknowledgments**
The authors acknowledge and appreciate:
- Sanggar Purwa Kencana
- Mrs. Noor Anani M. Irman

For their cooperation and time as interviewees and for helping to preserve the nation’s culture.