

Conference Paper

Theatre and Gendered Activism: Grassroot Discourses on Environmental Movement in Pasuruan

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Abstract

This paper deploys an interdisciplinary methodology and extends what is conventionally apprehended as discourse to include performance. It integrates the fields of performance studies, theater, gender studies and discourse analysis to document, contextualize and analyze the intersection of theater performance and activism in environmental movement initiated by IWINS (Initiatives for Water and Sanitation Improvement Through Network Supports) through the water and sanitation community network in Pasuruan. This paper considers why and how theater becomes an integral part of grass root activism, agency and collective identity narratives and counter narratives in confronting the ecological crisis in Pasuruan. By examining their discourse in light of Victor Turner's concept of social drama, this paper provides a theoretical argumentation and intertextual reading of performance-conscious activism as discourse.

Keywords: performance, discourse, grassroot, activism

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1. Introduction

Massive attention to environmental degradation, including climate change, biodiversity decline, ecological crisis and consumption injustice have driven the reaction of several cross-sectoral social institutions to move (Beddoe et al. 2009). Learning from substantive failure of government's top-down approach from above cases, strong attention is increasingly directed towards contribution of non-governmental actors and institutions, such as grassroots actors and its dimensions: networks, communities and movements are seen as important agents in the transition of sustainability, mitigation and crisis adaptation (Hafner-Burton et al. 2008). Studies on this issue have been spread through multidisciplinary studies, multi theories and terminology that are closely related to the problems of social-ecological systems, environmental politics, social psychology, environmental sociology and even performance studies. The knowledge emerged from the grassroots activism network strongly helped to balance the focus on the top-down technocratic processes that commonly found in development literature (Smith and Stirling 2010). At the same time, the focus on a network of grassroots activism also

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bridges the knowledge gap in sustainability transition and research on environmental issues.

Reflecting on research emphasizing on the context of JEMARIS-Academic collaboration for sustainable sanitation and clean water governance in the city and regency of Pasuruan, this paper aims to contextualize the environmental movement initiated by a grassroots community network in producing ecological crisis narratives and counter narrative through activism and theater media.

JEMARIS (Sanitation and Clean Water Community Network) is a grassroots community network formed by IWINS (Initiatives for Water and Sanitation Improvement through Network Support), a three-year project and funded by USAID through FIELD Foundation Indonesia with an orientation to access on sanitation and clean water in the region of Pasuruan (This research was carried out by the Culture Engineering research team, Department of Sociology, Brawijaya University in 2018. An outline of this study describes the initiation of IWINS to collaborate with academics to see and identify issues of clean water and sanitation in the Pasuruan City and Regency area). There are two types of assistance provided by the IWINS project, namely the provision of clean water channels and communal fecal channels. The focus of this project is to increase the capacity of the assisted groups in the management of sanitation facilities and organizational development. Capacity building carried out by the grassroots community in Pasuruan within the project called Sekolah Lapang (SL), defined as field schooling that aimed at empowering residents to learn in identifying environmental problems related to the management of sanitation and clean water based on local knowledge. A group of alumni who are members of the SL then formed a community network to facilitate coordination and continuity of the movement, which they named JEMARIS. This organization is not just moving on the level of conventional activism. They introduced a unique and creative approach in campaigning and knowledge transmission through theater.

The theatrical arts that will be discussed in the following description cover a variety of activities, including: disseminating the knowledge of JEMARIS as grassroots organizations and producing theatrical representations of social dramas. The realm of performing arts studies, with a cross-disciplinary approach, will describe activities within the conceptual framework of purposeful/teleological actions as performances. Furthermore, the framework will be developed through theoretical arguments related to theater and activism. This critical argument will not only identify social constructs that support human subjectivity, but also exercising theoretical formulations that help researcher to reconstruct agency concept holistically. Theater, a human activity involving the work of imagination, the construction of roles and collective identity and the

grassroots movements are specific discourses that will be critically discussed in this paper.

2. Materials and Methods

This article uses a qualitative method (Djamba and Neuman 2002) by viewing discourses of the grassroots communities in Pasuruan in countering narratives to produce healthier environment. This research is explanatory by documenting, contextualizing and analyzing the intersection of theater performance and activism in environmental movement initiated by IWINS (Initiatives for Water and Sanitation Improvement Through Network Supports) through water and sanitation community network in Pasuruan. In this article, I explore why and how theater becomes integral part of grass root activism, agency and collective identity narrative and counter narrative in confronting ecological crisis in Pasuruan. There are several stages in collecting data on the discourses of the grassroots community. First, I collected and identified several books, journals, articles, and research results related to environmental movement, social network and community engagement. Second, I conducted a theoretical mapping on those three subjects, which were then followed by compiling it in a descriptive and comparative form. Third, I conducted in-depth interviews with the informants within the project of IWINS and JEMARIS to get an overview of the theatre production processes and knowledge reproduction on the discourses of counter-narrative. Data analysis was carried out by making categorizations of each theme based on the context of research and methodology on grassroots discourses through theatre and activism. Lastly, I analyse theater performance as discourse and counter-narrative and social drama in the discourse of performance-conscious activism.

3. Result

3.1. Ecological Crisis in Pasuruan: A Narrative

Humans today are living in an era of ecological crisis which is actually the result of their own actions. The ecological crisis has become a major debate among scientists regarding the historical epics which they call the *anthropocene* to mark the period in which human activity is a primary driver of global ecological change. Many modern ecological problems refer to commodity tragedies and over exploitation of natural

resources (Hardin 2006). On the basis of efficiency and profit orientation, the dimensions of a serious ecological impact become minor concern for economic actors.

In the local context, the ecological crisis does not stop at the way economic actors pursue profits. Various socio-political aspects also become important dimensions for the emergence of the impacts itself. This reality becomes clear in the quality of the environment in the City and Regency of Pasuruan before IWINS program. The problem of decreasing environmental quality resulting in ecological crisis, generally caused by pollution of factory waste, unhealthy behavior patterns of residents, garbage littering and inadequate clean water supply infrastructure. As a consequence, the current level of public health in Pasuruan is far from as it should be.

3.2. Grassroots Activism: Agency, Network and Movement

Researchers and civil society organizations today have paid attention to grassroots network studies as an important source of activism and the driving force, in their role of supporting social transitions to sustainability and reducing the severity of environmental change. The grassroots network does this widely by creating social innovations in response to the problems they face and through alternative approaches to management and consumption of resources. Agents and grassroots networks are multidimensional in the socio-technical transition. They are able to adapt to change conditions differently than state actors (Seyfang and Smith 2007). Through the movement of resources in supporting the technology, grassroots networks are able to create social and cultural enclaves such as social organizations that have a different orientation to the technocratic regime. Support for this innovation explicitly and politically also has the potential as a driver of political capital to suppress bureaucratic institutions that tend to ignore the locality framework (Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012).

However, the characteristics of grassroots networks can also create weaknesses in their actions. Grassroots efforts in particular can be vulnerable because of state and corporate actor cooptation. The grassroots network can thus be exclusive and fail to incorporate a critical perspective on a relevant problem. When grassroots networks focus on solutions that are local, bottom-up and project-based, their effects can only be stopped through their closed trait (The closed nature in question is a frame of mind that results from the process of co-optation of state actors and corporate actors), which simultaneously limits their own capacity to develop general solutions or beyond specific contexts (Feola and Nunes 2014). Projects based on local knowledge and the living environment are very vulnerable to problems of incompatibility; that is, when

narrow-perspective solutions are offered as solution of social problems such as poverty or environmental deterioration which structurally-bureaucratic rather than technical.

The manifestation of the political dimension of grassroots networks, including the question of how participation is shaped by social and cultural factors, has recently not been well recorded in activism study and sustainability. Clearly, there are few crossings between bottom-up studies of innovation and participation in environmental movements. Most researcher see this case as a theoretical gap - because participation is a political issue that contains cultural narratives, agencies, collective identities. In the context of grassroots network movement in the issue of clean water and sanitation management in Pasuruan, activism through culture-based campaigns and collective identity is activated by agency narratives that are present in the form of theater performances and social processes work behind it. For agents who are members of JEMARIS themselves, the rationalization of selecting this campaign method lies in the corridor of social innovation driven by collective objective of the importance of clean water management and the existence of Communal Wastewater Disposal as a behavioral transition rite (The behavioral transition in question is a change in behavior patterns that are far from healthy living factors towards awareness of creating a healthy environment).

4. Discussion

4.1. Theater Performance as Discourse

For researcher, discourse can be defined as a form of social practices that make up the social world. As a social practice, discretion is in dialectical relationship with other social dimensions. Discourse does not only contribute to the formation and reproduction of social structures, but reflects the formation and reproduction of these social structures.

In this paper, the concept of discourse refers to the use of specific theatrical language to trace a broader context: it starts from non-verbal speech to those used in visual elements, including gestures, facial expressions, movements, costumes, players' bodies, property and decorations. In the art of theater engagement itself, the existence of a stage is literally embodied as universe of languages. By using language, we can create a representation of reality that is never just a reflection of the previous reality, but is able to contribute to the construction of reality. This does not mean that reality itself does not exist. The meaning and representation are real. Physical objects also exist, but those objects will only get meaning through discourse. In addition, theater can also display discourse through various ways. First, concretely: the stage encapsulates what

is said oppositely to what is said outside; Therefore, the relationship between speech on stage and cast is in the hands of composers. Second, referentially, the stage discourse pointed to what happened in the context of theatrical microcosms, namely the universe visualized by the director. Third, stage discourse places events in relation to the reality of the world outside the theater in certain spatial and temporal contexts (King 2005).

The act of speaking in discourse study is rarely found in various literatures. By putting a sentence in a specific context, the act of speaking is able to clarify the articulation of its concrete reality. The meaning is very close to contextualization. In narrative situations, therefore, a piece of sentence, rather than being seen as a series of markers without referential functions such as lines of sentences used in grammar or philosophical treatises, is potentially seen as narrative actions involving delivery and recipient agencies and particular space and time contexts (Loxley 2010). The important thing to do is to test the main nature of action in dramatic discourse. Thus, discourse in drama is called represented discourse, which transcends the concept of conventional discourse.

4.2. Counter-Narrative and Social Drama in the Discourse of Performance-Conscious Activism

The narrative of the ecological crisis that in Pasuruan provided a discursive impetus to agents who were members of the grassroots organization JEMARIS to produce counter narratives through theater performances. Theater which is carried by this organization has a simple concept without any complex stage art elements as well as large-scale performance. Some cross-generation people are lined up as actors and actresses who portray the distinctive character of the grassroots social structure that is close to the narrative of cosmopolitanism (read: collective identity, common destiny, similar experiences and so on). This is what has come to be called performance-conscious activism (This term was introduced by Kamran Afary (1994) in *Performance and Activism* when conducting a study of the riots that occurred in California in 1992. In his research he explored the black movement, urban youth, activists and feminist groups to carry out symbolic resistance to the supremacy of leather white) - activism that is displayed and presented through shared awareness. In this section, the artistic form of the performance will be a critical focus of the discourse of performance-conscious activism which causes political power on changes in the behavior patterns of citizens who received IWINS assistance.

Anthropologist Victor Turner's argument about social drama will also describe that cultural performances not only reflect the reality of the local culture, but also the agency's actions for change (Turner 1982). Turner developed the concept of social drama as a process that emphasizes the actions of agents who deconstruct, negotiate and reproduce. Social drama is episodes of turbulent social action that explode from the surface of routine social life that is usually smooth. Social drama resembles narration because they have visible grooves or stages that resemble the beginning, middle, and end. Actors recognize this process and try to determine the stages and structures of different plots that define larger social dramas, so that they direct them to the various paths they choose. Each stage and plot structure have affinity with certain interaction rituals that describe the sequence of stereotypical behavior. The social concept of the drama itself requires the following stages: (1) Violation (breach), namely the violated norm and the interwoven fabric of social life; (2) crisis, a condition in which the stability of social structures is threatened; (3) redress, the inherent performative stage - where action begins to be anatrical as a reflexive and mindful action; and (4) reconfiguration, a reality that encourages the configuration of social roles. Redress is the liminal stage, boundary experience, precarious conditions or even 'sacred' - which illustrates how culture can be recreated (Ibid).

Firstly, the knowledge formed in the SL is their basic capital in contextualizing counter-narratives through staging. This is reflected in the characterization process which tells how the behavior of littering and defecation is an act that is contrary to the idea of clean and healthy environment. This narrative is a form of discourse that is displayed on the pattern of people's lives that is far from health factors. A typical society that rejects this is usually hiding actions while at the same time expressing its legitimacy against the cognitive and normative principles which lie within the social framework. The narrative of rejection as a breach that exposing from theatrical microcosm on the stage is divided into two: first, passive rejection, namely the secret rejection, an indirect deviation from normative codes and a sense of dislike and criticism (example: gossiping, littering secretly). Second, active rejection, which is a more serious rejection because it openly destroys normative codes of the environment and tries to place a new framework of the situation (example: prognostic framing) (Benford and Snow 2000).

After the violation (breach) occurs, the narrative which is subsequently channeled in the process of characterizing on the stage is crisis; the crisis stage portrayed here is a group of people who are members of the SL involved in an external conflict and cast protagonist discourse against antagonists. The protagonist is illustrated as a group of people who are the vanguard of a healthy environment, while antagonists are those

who fight against the actions taken by the protagonist. The actions of the antagonist group are shown as discursive resistance movements based on the sentiment of social roles rather than the actions being taken, such as descent and political closeness with the village authorities.

When the crisis begins to rise, theatrical scenes that show agencies appear as a process of improvement (redress). Departing from the identity as SL alumni and a set of knowledge gained from it, collective action then comes as a counter narrative of the situation ecologically increasingly alarming in Pasuruan. The approach in voicing counter-narratives above emphasizes more on humor aspects. Rationalizing the choice of humor as a channel for behavior transition is far from being repressive. An informant named Misroti (SL alumni from Sumberdawe Sari) said that she had been appointed as an actress because she had a high sense of humor. For her humor is the most effective way to influence others. One element that is usually used in the theater drama JEMARIS is sunglasses. The reason he chose sunglasses was to attract the attention of the audience, because according to her, sunglasses were identical to the style of Syahrini, a singer who is much loved and known by common people of Indonesia. In the context of presenting this unique figure, the purpose of activism which involves the same experience and collective identity in producing counter-narratives is not necessarily reduced. Black glasses are just political semiotics, where one type of agency works to articulate the collective interests of JEMARIS grassroots organizations. Redress is something sacred or precarious, in the end, deconstructed and displayed as something humorous, but potentially reproducing social situations.

The final stage is reconfiguration, the theatrical drama presented by the JEMARIS theater ended with a portrait of healthy environmental conditions, namely no more trash-throwing behavior and open defecation. In addition, the social dimension that is the background of disputes and friction between elements of society is described as decreasing because the awareness to preserve the environment is an agenda that should be hastened and cooperation between social devices becomes increasingly developed, and we cannot merely disparage women's role in shaping the awareness. However, the reconfiguration stage mentioned by Turner empirically did not yet fully occur in JEMARIS's assisted community because of the social jealousy that flared up in the community which was motivated by a lack of practical and sociological impact on IWINS assistance.

5. Conclusion

The ecological crisis that occurred in the City and Regency of Pasuruan became an important starting point for the movement of the grassroots community network JEMARIS to produce counter-serious narratives on the environment which had decreased in quality. They are potential turning points in social situations where social order can be deconstructed, debated, and reformed through an entirely distinct method of theater performances. Theater is the locus of agency narratives and collective identity which is used as a resource to change social behavior which in fact is far from the element of a healthy environment, becomes a form of behavior that is sensitive to the quality of the environment around them. The discourse on equality of experience and behavior change explains how a group of men and women who joined the grassroots organization JEMARIS were driven discursively through the stages of social drama, in such a way that the surrounding social order could be deconstructed and then reproduced into new forms: a healthy environment.

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