

## Conference Paper

# Bapang Mask's Symbolic Power in the Attempt to Break Muri's Record in Malang District

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**ORCID:**Tri Wahyuningtyas: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2076-0109>**Abstract**

Bapang mask is one of the figures in Malang's puppet show, which is unique compared to other masks. It has a long nose and a sharp, red-colored face with bulging eyes. It possesses a manly character and enjoys flattery, and is a symbol of the legitimacy of the Malang district government's power. The symbol of the Bapang mask in MURI's record-breaking attempt is a practice of power that legitimizes culture in dominating the domain of a discourse struggle (between politics and preserving culture). This study describes Bapang mask's symbolic power in breaking the MURI's record in Malang district. This qualitative study used interviews, document analysis, and observations, which were analyzed using a poststructuralist approach through Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. The results of the study revealed that the symbolic system through the discourse of preserving Bapang masks in MURI's record-breaking attempt is a representation of a symbolic system capable of producing power on political and cultural domination. This symbolic power forms the legitimacy of truth in the attempt to preserve traditional arts using Bapang mask.

**Keywords:** symbolic power, discourse, preserving

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## 1. Introduction

This study discusses Bapang mask dance at the attempt to break MURI's record in Malang district. Bapang mask dance is a small part of the Malang's mask puppet shows. A mask puppet show is a traditional theater performance or drama featuring a dancer whose face is covered by a mask. The elements of a mask puppet performance include dancing, masks (face coverings), dancers, musicians, stories, puppeteers, and music, all of which are related in the field of performing arts. The masks referred to in this research are firstly, the performance of art that is performed in an event or an art activity in the form of a Bapang mask dance with 5,000 dancers. Secondly, the Bapang mask



dance is performed en masse at Malang's Beach Festival in commemoration of Malang District Anniversary.

This research is interesting for a source of art studies because it is not only related to performing arts, but it is also closely related to the attempt to preserve traditional arts in Malang district. In this study, the researcher observed that the traditional performing arts which functioned as a ritual or as entertainment had experienced a shift in function, namely as a means of political propaganda for the authorities, or the government of Malang district. Most of the performing arts research related to traditional arts in Malang district mostly observes and analyses from symbolic interactions point of view, which shows arts as rituals or entertainment. Thus, this study tries to observe performing arts from a poststructuralist perspective.

The poststructuralist approach is a view that puts forward the concepts of discourse in which subjectivity or agency is constructed by arbitrary cultural and historical forces. Each individual is restricted by the power of culture and history which is able to shift ideas about a whole and sovereign subject because the desire, motivation, and concepts about humans emerge from conversations (discourse), not from free and rational will [1]

Based on the poststructuralist view, culture here is defined as a product of power with abundance and attraction between various kinds of discourse and power/ knowledge structures [1]. The statement describing the position of Bapang mask dance as an interest of power was revealed in the narrative of the Malang Regent's speech on the occasion of the Malang Beach Festival event, a series of events to commemorate the Anniversary of Malang district in 2017 by holding a Bapang mask dance performance consisting of 5000 dancers. He stated that stating that conservation and development efforts Traditional arts, especially Malang masks, are expected to become the local identity / icon of Malang district. This is also confirmed by a statement made by the Head of the Malang District Tourism and Culture Office. He stated that with the mass Bapang mask dance it is expected to be an encouragement for the younger generation and the community to preserve culture, as well as to optimize tourist visits, especially to beach tourism. Through the Malang Beach Festival event, Malang District is able to reach one million tourists, so that the target of 6 million tourists this year, according to instructions from Malang Regent, Dr. H Rendra Kresna, has been achieved [2].

On the other hand, the policy of preservation and promotion of tourism through the mass Bapang mask dance consisting of 5,000 dancers has become a polemic for art actors and some Malang district people, because of the emergence of blue attributes from the mask and scarf properties used by the dancers. It was assumed that there was an indication of a hidden attempt and power behind the blue attribute used by dancers.

By default, the properties of the masks used by dancers, especially in the ornament of mask carving motifs worn on the dancers' faces, use various colors of decoration, as well as the *sampur* (shawl) which is usually yellow, based on the character being played during the dance. Normally, the shape of the Bapang mask has the form of a mask with a long nose, a sharp face with red color and bulging eyes, and it has a manly character which likes flattery.

Various views and opinions emerged during the mass polemic of the Bapang mask dance on MURI's record-breaking attempt in Malang district. The decision of the Malang district government made the Bapang mask dance a discourse for the preservation of traditional arts, which is not only for momentary interests but also a domination of power as a symbol of legitimacy over culture. The aforementioned background shows that there is an interesting issue (a main issue) to be examined through a poststructuralist approach. When Bapang mask dance is positioned as a culture, it turns out that there are many people who have the power to speak up and they take advantage from it for their own interests. The mixture of various interests led to varied meanings of government policies that differ from one to another[3]. This means that the Malang district government's decision to make the Bapang mask dance as a discourse for the preservation of traditional arts does not stand alone, because everyone has the same right to give meaning. In addition, there are so many art actors who are 'forcefully disciplined' by this policy. More than that, this policy has quite broad implications in society.

## 2. Methodology

This research approach uses qualitative research, with research data in the form of words and actions of mask dancers and institutions responsible for the development of arts and culture in Malang district. The data are explored through in-depth interviews, documents, and observations. Sources of oral interviews were obtained from informants, including Mr. Handoyo (a mask dancer who is given the responsibility to prepare Bapang mask dances), and Mrs. Ratna Candra (Head of Arts Development Section, Malang district). The method of analysis uses Pierre Bourdier's theory of practice, with the aim of describing the power of the Bapang mask symbol in the attempt to break the MURI's Record in Malang District.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Bapang mask is one of the characters in the Panji story in the Malang mask puppet show. In details, Bapang mask story is based on the character of Bapang Jaya Sentiko, a Duke of Joyo Patoman, who has a dashing character and likes flattery. The Bapang character in the mask puppet show is not the main character; thus, he appears at the interlude/ pause in the scene during the mask puppet show. The puppet mask audience refers it as an “extra” scene, which is a part that has no constructive connection, but it becomes an integral part of the whole show. The scene is similar to the Bambang-Cakil scene, commonly shown in the *Wayang Wong (human puppet)* or *Wayang Kulit Purwa* [4]. In its development, the scene of the Bapang character in a separate mask puppet show becomes a separate dance called the Bapang mask single dance. The appearance of the Bapang character is a form of dance presentation, which describes Bapang’s journey to a country owned by his brother, Klana Sewandana.

The shape and form of Bapang masks are slightly different from other figures in the Malang mask puppet show, namely the face with a red base color, sharp wide eyes, and a long nose (like a Pinocchio, a cartoon character). Visually, the appearance of the Bapang mask is attractive and has the distinctiveness of the form of the Bapang mask figure. Thus, the shape of the Bapang mask is the distinguishing characteristic of other mask figures.

By looking at the uniqueness of the Bapang mask figures in the Malang mask puppet show, this mask is known in many regions. One of them was when a mask puppet artist was holding a mask puppet show in Yogyakarta for the 2017 Mask Festival. Handoyo (interviewed on June 2020) said that during the Mask Festival in Yogyakarta, Asmara Bangun Kedungmonggo Art Gallery performed a puppet mask performance and Bapang mask dance as an addition scene in the story. Upon seeing the Bapang mask dance, the enthusiasm of the audience was extraordinary because Bapang mask was only owned by Malang’s mask puppet. Meanwhile, mask puppets from other areas were not performed in the same festival.

The uniqueness of the Bapang mask shapes the public’s trust in the performance, so it is not surprising that many people want to take advantage of Bapang mask performances to achieve their interest. This is what government officials utilize or use as a medium for socializations and to promote their programs. One of those programs is the tourism program and the preservation of cultural arts promoted by the Malang district government by holding a mass Bapang mask dance performance at Ngantep beach. This activity was held in the framework of Malang District’s Anniversary. The popularity of

Bapang masks is the result of the effect of public trust on the appearance of mask artists, elementary and high school students through performances in various places both at the local and national levels. This is also a strong reason for the Malang Regent to adopt the Bapang mask as a dance that will become the cultural identity of Malang District. In connection with this reason, Handoyo (Kedungmonggo mask artist) also conveyed that with the choice of the Bapang mask dance being held on the Anniversary of Malang District, it has been widely used as dance material in extracurricular activities in schools in Malang district, so the Bapang mask dance will be easily performed at the masses in the framework of an anniversary event. In addition, public trust on the preserving effort of traditional arts becomes the provision for the Malang district government to be able to direct the community to be more disciplined and obedient to the directions given by the Regent. This was reinforced by the Regent's speech which stated that, "*With the mass Bapang mask performance consisting of 5000 dancers performed by elementary and junior high school students throughout Malang district, the community have fully committed themselves to the efforts of preserving cultural arts in Malang district. This can be seen from the awarding given by MURI to Malang district, and this is an effort by the Malang district government preserve arts and culture.*" [5]. This is also reinforced by a statement from the Head of Malang Arts Development Section Ratna (interviewed on April 6, 2019) that the effort of preserving arts and culture through Bapang mask dance on the anniversary of Malang district is the government's commitment in fostering and developing traditional arts of Malang district.

Through instructions and directions from the Regent as the Regional Head of Malang District towards the efforts to preserve traditional arts in the form of mass Bapang mask dance to the public, they are not aware that their thoughts and behaviors have been directed by the authorities through a discourse. The words used in Malang Regent's speech has occupied a strategic position in introducing an ideology behind it, and presupposes power in practice. In addition, the shape of clothes worn by Bapang dancers is also the most dominant symbol, namely the blue color found in the properties of the masks. The ornaments used on the Bapang mask on the forehead and the shawl are blue. It is clear that the color used on the clothes and properties of the Bapang mask refers to one of the ruling parties. Symbols contain the power to form the face of reality. That power is stored in the process of categorizing, evaluating, and imposing certain ideas on the object that interprets the symbol. In this case, the operation of the power of symbols cannot be separated from the structure or agent (the Regent) who has an interest in constructing reality. The discourse on the Bapang mask as an icon or cultural identity of Malang district as a symbolic discourse is used as political

capital for the government in claiming/ legitimizing the preservation of cultural arts. This is an attempt by the authorities to preserve, increase social recognition, legitimacy and respect through a scheme of perception and appreciation that is appropriate to property, or in Bourdieu language it is a symbolic investment strategy [6]. The obvious symbolic investment strategy in this case is in the form of words, actions, clothes, the 5000 dancers, and this is a symbolic instrument that can demonstrate the legitimacy of power over cultural arts through Bapang mask.

The practice carried out by the authorities through interactions built by holding 5000 Bapang mask dancers on the attempt of breaking MURI's record with elementary and junior high school students, art actors, both artists and teachers throughout Malang district joining the event, shows a design of concept in the form of symbolic power. The concept of symbolic power according to [7]. In his book entitled '*Language and Symbolic Power*' states that symbolic power operates anywhere, anytime and anyone, and works under human consciousness to construct human thoughts and behavior. The effect caused by symbolic power is that it ends at justifying the agent's interest in a social phenomenon. Symbolic power is also a power to construct reality through a gnoseological order, which is the closest meaning to the social world of a group or person [7]. Symbolic power is power that is invisible and can only be identified by its purpose to gain recognition. A symbolic power, even though its true form cannot be recognized, is still recognized. Symbolic power works by using symbols as an instrument of "coercion" against sub-ordinate groups that play a role in reproducing social order according to the wishes of the dominant group. As described by [7]: "What creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them."

From the description above, it can be explained that there are two things that the power of symbolic power works, which depends on: 1). performative discourse, namely symbolic power based on symbolic capital ownership, that the greater a Regent / leader or a group who has symbolic capital, the greater his chances of winning. That is, symbolic capital is a credit for the formation of social authority obtained from previous battles; 2). symbolic effectiveness where the symbolic investment strategy works, which means that this effectiveness works on the basis of the views offered or the extent to which the symbolic investment strategy is carried out. In this view, symbolic power is a power of ordination, a power to hide or reveal something through words. A regent/ leader can carry out all government policies and programs related to the preservation of cultural arts in Malang district and it can be carried out as effectively as possible by taking steps in accordance with the Malang district development strategy plan. By holding Malang

Beach event in the framework of the Anniversary of Malang district which performed a mass Bapang mask dance consisting of 5000 dancers at Ngantep beach, a regent / leader can practice his symbolic power easily. The acquisition of MURI's record in these activities has also strengthened the symbolic power network in Malang district, or even nationally. In Bourdieu's view, symbolic power is not possessed but is applied in a domain predetermined by the agent. Agents need some capital to practice their symbolic power in a realm. The capital that has been owned will be put at stake in the realm of creating an atmosphere which is also desired by the agent bou[8].

#### 4. Conclusion and Suggestion

Symbolic power through the mass performance of Bapang mask dance is a practice of dominating the authorities in exalting power over arts and culture in Malang district. There is a strong symbolic dominance in the form of oppression using symbols (through language and clothing). Through the power of symbol, Bapang mask is interpreted, named, and defined to lead the sub-dominant class (artists) to recognition and acceptance of the discourse of the regent/ leader (which has large symbolic capital). Symbolic power creates legitimacy for truth in efforts to preserve traditional arts through the Bapang mask.

With the Bapang mask as a manifestation of the arts and culture of Malang district, it is hoped that the role of the government in the fostering, developing, and preserving traditional arts will be further enhanced and carried out continuously. In an effort to maintain traditional art as a regional identity, it is necessary to have a Regional Regulation that can oversee the existence of arts and culture in Malang district.

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