



From Ritual to Commercial: Commodification *Barong* Performing Art as a Form of Balinese People Negotiation towards Tourism

*I Gusti Agung Pradnyadari*¹, *Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra*²

^a Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University, Bali

^b Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

One element of Balinese culture used as a tourist attraction is described as performance art. Performing arts that were originally sacred gradually changed to profane. *Barong* as one of the performing arts is commodified. It can be stated that the research question is divided into three, namely: (1) What is the form of commodification of *barong* performing arts as a cultural tourism attraction in the perspective of the Balinese people? (2) Why does the process of commodification of *barong* performing arts occur?, and (3) What is the meaning and function of *barong* performing arts which are presented for the benefit of tourism in the perspective of the Balinese?

Qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach are used in this study. Data was collected through literature studies, observations and in-depth interviews with resource persons. The shift from a sacred to a profane *barong* is not only taken for granted, but through a negotiation process. This process produces a space that contains flexibility for Balinese people. There is a process of addition and subtraction in a work of art, so it is worthy to be presented to the stage. The meaning and function of profane *barong* is an extension of the meaning and function of the previous *barong*. This does not mean removing its religious meaning and function.

Keywords: *Cultural Tourism, attractions, commodification, barong kuntisraya*

1. Introduction

Bali is known as one of the tourist destinations that has various types of arts in its culture. One of the elements of Balinese culture that is used as a tourist attraction is the performing arts. One of the performance arts that still be a talking point is *Barong Kuntisraya*, which is better known as *Barong and Keris Dance* among tourists. This was reinforced by the designation of *Barong Kuntisraya* as one of the nine traditional Balinese dances and intangible world cultural heritage at the 10th UNESCO meeting on December 2, 2015, with the theme *Representatives List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* held in Windhoek, Namibia, South Africa. *Barong* is symbolically the embodiment of a mythological animal played by two dancers (one in front, at the head, and one behind, at the tail). *Barong* as one of the performing arts has experienced commodification. *Barong* performing arts originally functioned as a ritual ceremony, then gradually turning into commercial art. In Hindu religious activities in Bali, *barong* performances are held with the story of *Calon Arang*, while for tourism purposes the *Kuntisraya* play is used.

The idea of creating a *Barong Kuntisraya* dance drama for the benefit of tourism is considered a solution to anticipate the presence of tourists who generally have limited time. The author sees, that there is a tendency that shows that Balinese dance has experienced a lot of commodification, especially related to the presence of tourists, where dance is used as an attraction. The dynamics of tourism have a considerable influence on the performing arts in Bali. As one example, *barong* has experienced a shift. The number of tourists who come to Bali every year is quite significant. Departing from the idea that there is a particular group that wants a certain form of art, tourism art appears as an answer to the needs of tourists. This is in line with Soedarsono's idea (2002: 273) that tourism art has five characteristics, namely: (1) imitations of the original, (2) shorter than the original, (3) full of variations, (4) put off magical and sacred values, and (5) cheap in terms of the value of tourists' money.

Based on some of the literature that has been studied, ritual studies that have similarities with *barong* ritual practices generally use evolutionary, functional, and interpretive paradigms (interpretation of ritual symbols). The book named *Kaja and Kelod: Balinese Dance in Transition* (1981) and *Evolusi Tari Bali* (1996) by Bandemandde Boer define Balinese dance in full, starting from the sacred to the secular. *Wali* and *bebali* dances are sacred and magical, while the form of secular is *balih-balihan* dances. From the two books, information is obtained that the form and function of dance is always related to the context in which it is held. This study provides an initial overview as well as an important value in positioning *Barong Kuntisraya* dance dramas regarding their context.

The transformation of the *Kuntisraya* dance drama from old Javanese literature into a text of performing arts tourism in Bali studied by Dyah Kustiyanti (2002) states that stories and literary themes, especially classical literature, have been adapted for the benefit of the performing arts, both dance drama and theater. In the transformation of Sudamala's literature into *Barong and Kris Dance* performances, there will be structural differentiation and deviation due to dance drama having a very complex aspect compared to literary works. Soedarsono's book (2002) entitled *Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia di Era Globalisasi* tends to observe Indonesian performing arts from the past to the era of globalization. Historical research is needed from prehistoric times to the present. Soedarsono unraveled the history of Indonesian performances by classifying them according to time, function in society, and tourism performances in the era of globalization. In accordance with period traces, the show is divided into prehistoric times, Hindu influences, Islamic influences, Chinese influences, Western influences, independence, The New Order and globalization. In this paper, the *barong* is placed in prehistoric times, which is seen as a genre of performance embodiment of a totem animal. A fair detailed description of the performing arts in each period is the result of sharpening the history of the performance.

Erawan (1987) stated from the economic point of view in his dissertation entitled *The Role of Tourism in the Bali Economy: The Effect of Doubling Tourist Expenditure on Community Income*. Erawan explained in detail about the three main areas that are heavily influenced by the tourism industry in Bali, specifically the economic, social and environmental fields. In the economic field, the tourism industry has created new job opportunities, raised the level of income and welfare of the Balinese people, and the country's foreign exchange. Meanwhile in the social field, the phenomenon of tourism which increases social interaction between the local community and multicultural tourists has had an influence on the lifestyle and social norms of certain communities in Bali. Eiseman (1990) in his book called *Bali Sekala and Niskala: Essays on Religion, Ritual, and Art* refers to the point of view of Hinduism in Bali, various rituals and supernatural powers, the implementation of the *yadnya* ceremony and various forms of performing arts. The first part of this book examines religion; the second focuses on rituals and magical powers; the third part explores the implementation of religious ceremonies in the temple; and the fourth section discusses various kinds of performing arts including examining the art of *barong* which discusses more about the performing arts of *barong sekala*, performances that appear in Hindu religious life in Bali.

The commodification theory was chosen as the analytical point to explain the form of commodification of *barong* performance art. Commodification is basically an effort to make things sell well in the market by utilizing the growing environmental conditions. Commodification can explain the processes and stages of commodification, starting from the process of production, distribution, to consumption. Piliang (2006: 21) stated that commodification is a process of making something that was not a commodity before becoming a commodity. The commodification defined by Barker (2005: 517) is a process associated with capitalism in which objects, qualities, and signs are converted into commodities, whose main purpose is to be sold. Commodification is often associated with commercialization, therefore *barong* is assumed to be a commodity aimed at sources of income.

2. Methodology

The method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method with an ethnographic approach. Data was collected through literature studies, observations and in-depth interviews with resource persons. The term ethnography refers to the specificity of writing and reporting based on intensive field research. The ethnographic method developed by Spradley derives from a new school in anthropology, namely cognitive anthropology or ethno-science or new ethnography. This new ethnography focuses on finding how society organizes the culture that exists in mind and uses that culture in everyday life. The ethnographic research process is described as follows. The ethnographic method by Spradley is known as a guide to The Development Research Sequence. The step-by-step research steps forward include twelve main steps as a guide in ethnographic interview techniques. The twelve basic steps are; (1) choosing social situations, (2) conducting participatory observations, (3) recording ethnographic data, (4) conducting descriptive observations, (5) domain analysis, (6) conducting focused observation, (7) analysis taxonomy, (8) doing selective observation, (9) compound analysis, (10) theme analysis, (11) making cultural discoveries, (12) making ethnographic reports (Marzali, in Spradley, 2006: vii-xvi). The twelve steps above can be grouped into four stages, where each stage is increasingly narrowed and also repeats as a cycle. Here are twelve steps of ethnographic research.

1. Assigning an informant
2. Interviewing informants
3. Making ethnographic notes
4. Asking descriptive questions
5. Conducting an ethnographic interview analysis
6. Making domain analysis
7. Asking structural questions
8. Making a taxonomic analysis
9. Asking contrast questions
10. Making component analysis

11. Find cultural themes
12. Ethnographic writing

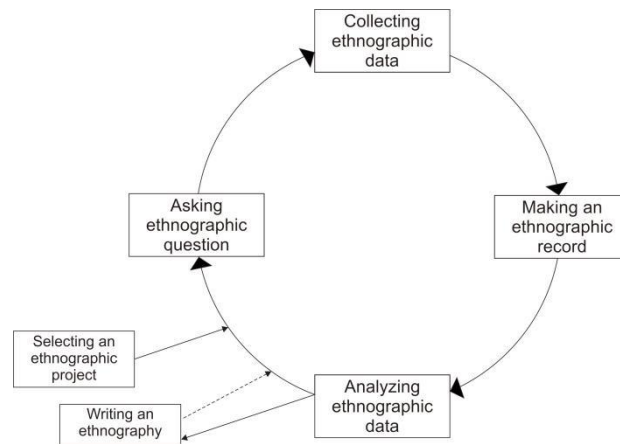


Fig. 1 Ethnographic Research Cycle

Source: Redrawn by Researchers from Spradley, 2007

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 The results of this study indicate that (1) the form of commodification of *barong* can be seen from the *back stage-front stage* process, including in relation to production, distribution, and consumption. Commodification occurs on a different one-hour stage than sacred *barong* which takes an entire night (*commodification of time*), the stage is deliberately made permanent for regular *barong* performances by adopting *bentar* temple architecture (*commodification of the stage*), *Sesajen* is kept to a minimum because the show is only intended for entertainment (*commodification of offerings*), the flow of the show is shortened, compacted, there are even parts that are added and eliminated (*commodification of the performance structure*). These four forms of commodification differentiate sacred and profane *barongs* for tourist attractions. (2) Tourism as an external factor and Balinese idealism as an internal factor led to the commodification of *barong* performing arts, (3) The meaning and function of the sacred *barong* remain in force today. The meaning and function of profane *barong* is an extension of the meaning and function of the previous *barong*. This does not mean removing its religious meaning and function. Characteristics of art that contain elements of Balinese culture are still maintained by the community, while on the other hand Balinese art is also open and flexible to new ideas that give birth to contemporary art in every product that is commercialized. The value of cultural products changes from religious value to economic value commercial products. Cultural commercialization eventually becomes an unavoidable condition in tourism activities in a culture.

3.2 Tourism is a stimulus for Balinese artists to return to work exploring traditional forms. These art forms are packaged in such a way as to always prioritize the values of ethics, aesthetics and logic. There is a dialogue between traditional arts (with strong norms, customs and religions) and the tourism industry that has a business orientation. In the world of tourism, *barong* as one of the potential arts that are inseparable from Balinese society is finally used as an economic value commodity and a source of income. The commodification process occurs due to a cross cultural encounter. The two cultural meetings took place between the Balinese (*hosts*) and tourists (*guests*). It then raises the demand for *barong* as a cultural tourism attraction.

3.3 The shift from a sacred to a profane *barong* is not only taken for granted, but through a negotiation process. This process produces a space that contains flexibility for Balinese people. There is a process of adding and subtracting (beheading) in a work of art, so it is worthy to be presented to the stage. The artistic parts are more highlighted, while the sacred and spiritual values of *barong* are removed. So, new forms are created with new norms.

3.4 Tourism forms a travel agency and presents tourist demand for performing arts. There is demand for tourists in general because they have limited time. Art which was originally part of the worship process is commodified, so that it can adapt to the market climate. As a result, there were various stage performances that were scattered in Bali and made the place as the center of art creation, new art institutions with new norms as well. Various adjustments are made so that tourists can take advantage of vacation time as efficiently as possible. This condition is what encourages artists to present art that is short, solid, not sacred, but still in the characteristics of existing characteristics. This kind of art is an imitation of the original (pseudo-art) and is always ready to be staged. The stage schedule is arranged by the organizer. The duration of the show is packed into one hour. In one day the performance art of *Barong Kuntisraya* was staged more than once. The commodification of *barong* performing arts in Bali is related to what is called an agency. The agency acts as an intermediary or mediator.

4. Conclusion

The commodification of *barong* performing arts as a cultural tourism attraction is understood as one form of Balinese people negotiation of tourism. In this case, the commodification of culture responds to the challenges of the development of the tourism industry faced with traditional Balinese performing arts. The meeting of the two domains, art and tourism must be seen in terms of being profitable and expected to have a good impact. The impact of tourism on Balinese society is not only beneficial in economic terms, but also in terms of culture. There is bargaining in the process until a mutually beneficial agreement is reached. Cultural commodification is a choice of Balinese people that is developed based on the cultural values they have. The existence of economic benefits that can be achieved while still paying attention to aspects of protection of culture is very dependent on the development objectives and the authorities that control them.

In essence, art life in Bali, both sacred and profane art, develops side by side and is very dependent on the concept of the *desa, kala, patra*. Economic benefits derived from tourism activities have proven to be able to increase the income and welfare of Balinese people, but there are sacrifices that must be borne by the community. As a supporting element of culture, Balinese people are responsible for maintaining its sustainability. A work of art is not the final destination that stagnates after it is successfully held. Coaching efforts can provide a space for movement as well as a place for the diversification of cultural tourism products to develop better in terms of quantity and quality.

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