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The Role of Nyi Ageng Serang in Guerilla Strategy of Diponegoro War: An Inspiration for Choreography Work

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ABSTRACT

One of the female heroines from Central Java who are less well known nationally apart from Cut Nyak Din, Maria Tinahahu and Kartini is Nyi Ageng Serang or Kustiah Wulaningsih Retno Edi. She was known as female war tacticians belonging to the Yogyakarta and Diponegoro palaces. Kustiah inherited warrior spirit from his father, Panembahan Notoprojo, commander and comrade in arms of P. Mangkubumi who led him to become Sultan Hamenku Buwana I. Kustiah also joined Bregada Nyai and received military education at Yogyakarta palace. While staying at the palace, she read a lot of ancient manuscripts in the library and married to Raden Sundoro, the crown prince. She felt that living in the palace was felt boring, so that when her father died, Kustiah returned to Serang to lead the struggle against the Dutch. She attained her knowledge about war tactics from both ancient texts and her battle experience. Her belief as Muslim descendant of Sunan Kalijaga believing Al-Qur'an also led her to be brave. at the age of 73, Nyi Ageng Serang withdrew from the battlefield and died in 1828. She was buried in Serang, then moved to Kulonprogo. Nyi Ageng Serang's struggle based on intelligence and Islamic beliefs has inspired the choreographer to choreograph a dance revealing the secrets of Nyi Ageng Serang's becoming expert of guerrilla war strategy. The moves come from Javanese dance which is soft but heroic and agile. The work involves 3 dancers, one as Nyi Ageng Serang while the other 2 dancers as soldiers. The dance music is composed based on contemporary Javanese sampled via MIDI and the makeup is also Javanese style during Islamic era. The scenography is in the form of a wide white backdrop cloth which can express the metaphor of the war atmosphere in silhouette combined with an animated video. This choreography was recorded by using long take and one shot techniques and carried out on a proscenium stage equipped with lighting. The duration of the video dance is around 8 minutes.

Keywords: Nyi Ageng Serang; strategy; war; Lumbu leaves; Diponegoro

ABSTRAK

Pahlawan wanita dari Jawa Tengah yang kurang dikenal secara nasional seperti pahlawan wanita Cut Nyak Din, Maria Tinahahu dan Kartini yaitu Nyi Ageng Serang atau Kustiah Wulaningsih Retno Edi. Tercatat dalam sejarah sebagai wanita ahli siasat perang yang dimiliki kraton Yogyakarta dan Diponegoro. Kustiah mewarisi darah pejuang dari ayahanda Panembahan Notoprojo, panglima sekaligus sahabat seperjuangan P. Mangkubumi yang menghantarkan hingga menjadi Sultan Hamenku Buwana I. Kustiah juga sempat bergabung pada Bregada Nyai mendapat pendidikan kemiliteran di keraton Yogyakarta, selama di keraton banyak membaca naskah kuno di perpustakaan. Saat di keraton bertemu dan sempat menikah dengan Raden Sundoro putra mahkota, namun hidup di keraton terasa membosankan dan dikekang oleh peraturan, maka pada saat ayahnya wafat Kustiah punya alasan untuk kembali ke Serang memimpin perjuangan melawan Belanda. Pengetahuan tentang taktik perang banyak diperoleh dari naskah kuno yang dibaca selain dari



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pengalamannya terjun ke medan laga. Ditambah keyakinannya sebagai umat Islam keturunan Sunan Kalijaga, bahwa semua penindasan terhadap manusia secara keji tidak sesuai dengan ayat suci Al-Quran yang menjadi pegangan hidup Kustiah. Maka penjajah harus nusnah di atas bumi. Nyi Ageng Serang di usia 73 tahun mundur dari medan perang dan pada tahun 1828 wafat dimakamkan di Serang, kemudian dipindah ke Kulonprogo. Perjuangan yang didasari kecerdasan dan penguasaan syariat Islam Nyi Ageng Serang mengilhami koreografer untuk mengkoreografikan sebuah garapan tari yang mengungkap rahasia sehingga mampu menjadi ahli strategi perang gerilya. Geraknya bersumber dari tari Jawa yang lembut namun bernuansa heroik, tangkas dan trengginas. Ditarikan oleh 3 penari, yang satu sebagai Nyi Ageng Serang sedang 2 penari lainnya sebagai prajurit. Musik tari dikomposisikan berdasar kontemporer Jawa yang disampling melalui MIDI. Rias busana juga masih bernuansa Jawa pada zaman Islam. Skenografi berupa kain backdrop warna putih lebar yang bisa mengekspresikan metafor suasana perang secara siluet yang di padukan dengan video yang imajinatif. Koreografi ini divideokan dengan teknik long take dan one shot untuk untuk dramatika serta estetika bahasa gambar. Perakaman video dilakukan di proscenium stage yang dilengkapi tata cahaya. Durasi tari video sekitar 8 menit.

Kata kunci: Nyi Ageng Serang; strategi; perang; daun Lumbu; Diponegoro

1. Introduction

The very famous Indonesian heroine from Aceh, Tjoet Nja' Dhien (12th May 1848 – 6th November 1908) fought against the colonialists, and Raden Adjeng Kartini (21st April 1879 – 17th September 1904) fought for Indonesian women right to have the equal opportunity to men in terms of going to school. Tjoet Nja' Dhien and Kartini were even made into feature films which received positive appreciation from the audience at that time. Widi Widayat in “Suara Merdeka” wrote that Kustiah Wulaningsih was born in Serang village, the daughter of Panembahan Notoprojo in 1762 (Lasminah, 2007). Other sources say that she was born in 1752 and died in 1828 at the age of 76 years old (Verelladevanka, 2021). Looking at the years of Nyi Ageng Serang's struggle long before Tjoet Nja' Dhien and Kartini, they had fought a lot the emancipation of women to have the same position as men in defending the country, not just woman “behind the scene” or housewife. They stood at the forefront of the battle, leading soldiers equipped with traditional weapons and organizing war strategies – guerrilla tactics – that were able to tear apart the colonial defenses. Kustiah changed her name to Nyi Ageng Serang after marrying Prince Kusuma Wijaya who became Duke of Serang.

Nyi Ageng Serang continued her father's struggle when the Diponegoro war broke out in 1825-1830. Because of her experience and steadfastness in opposing Dutch colonialism, with the approval of Prince Diponegoro, Nyi Ageng Serang was appointed as general advisor, but she preferred to always be among the soldiers on the front line. Thanks to guidance and advice from Nyi Ageng Serang, the Dutch was successfully defeated. Nyi Ageng Serang was at the forefront sitting on a horse, leading the troops, and always accompanying her brave grandson, guarding his red and white “Gula Kelapa” Flag which was attached to an heirloom spear. She also did not forget her heirloom scarf, the symbol of Nyi Ageng Serang's military service, which was tucked over her heirloom spear. Approaching the age of 76, Nyi Ageng Serang's health condition got worse. She got disease and died in 1828 (Lasminah, 2007). During the period of Nyi Ageng Serang's fought, it was proven that Serang area had never been controlled by the Dutch until Nyi Ageng Serang passed away.

The formulations of this research are: (1) Why was Nyi Ageng Serang able to become a guerrilla warfare strategist? (2) How is the transformation process of Nyi Ageng Serang's role into group choreography with the theme of Nyi Ageng Serang's guerrilla struggle behind Lumbu leaves? The objective of this research is honoring heroines having roles as war strategists at Yogyakarta and Diponegoro palaces. The benefit of this research, especially for students is having experience creating art with lecturers and the benefit for the people of Yogyakarta is providing correct information about Nyi Ageng Serang since people have thought that she is from Kulonprogo

2. Literature Review

2.1. A Female Warrior

Nyi Ageng Serang, whose full name is R.A. Kustiah Wulaningsih Retno Adi (Edi) (1752-1828), was the daughter of Panembahan Notoprojo, a comrade in arms of Prince Mangkubumi who in 1746 – 1755 took up arms against the Dutch (V.O.C). Panembahan Notoprojo was assigned to control Semarang and Rembang areas. Serang village was chosen as the central area for war preparation since it is located on the banks of the Serang river, the west of Sumber Lawang sub-district between Purwadadi Grobogan and Gundih districts. The troops led by Panembahan Notoprojo were called Pasukan Pelopor Gugus Depan. The war strategy used was guerrilla warfare (Lasminah, 2007).

Nyi Ageng Serang is a female warrior character from the last series of Gianti manuscripts from 1755 to the period of Prince Diponegoro's fight (1825 – 1830). Her life history has great significance for the development of patriotic nationalist education. In the period of 1755 – 1830, people did not know the meaning of emancipation, but Kustiah showed that she was familiar with emancipation in resistance to the colonialists. Apart from that, Kustiah proved that she was agile at reading Javanese scripts in Yogyakarta palace library and understood the contents of sentences, thereby she gained significant improvement in her knowledge about war strategy. Since she was young, she had learned to read Qur'an, as a requirement for the heir of Sunan Kalijaga. Thus, she had a thorough understanding of Islamic law.

In various battles led by Nyi Ageng Serang and her grandson, Raden Mas Papak, were always able to defeat the Dutch. All the wins were gained owing to their foremost tactic of Lumbu leaf camouflage (taro leaves). It is completely clear that Nyi Ageng Serang's struggle at that time was an appropriate response to the challenges of the wartime. At Yogyakarta palace, R.A. Kustiah knew more about princes who had the same views as hers, including R.M. Ontowiryo (P. Diponegoro), Tom Alap-Alap, Joyokusumo, Hadiwijoyo, Diposono. Dewi Ratih (wife of P. Diponegoro). So, when the Diponegoro war broke out, Nyi Ageng Serang was assigned by Diponegoro to organize guerrilla tactics that she had mastered since she supported her father's guerrilla in Serang.

2.2 A Thinker and Inisiator

Nyi Ageng Serang had vision that colonialism not only wanted to control politics and the economy, but even obscured the understanding of cultural, personal and spiritual aspects. Poverty and suffering would cause humans to forget the needs of the soul. Humans were not machines, but physical and spiritual creatures who also needed holy spiritual support (Lasminah, 2007). Nyi Ageng Serang said that body and soul of a human being had similarities with the house and yard. The house needed a wall fence and the yard needed a fence. Likewise, the body needed spiritual support to keep the body healthy. What she stated was a proof of how agile her brain was, so that she developed such meaningful views. The house and yard must be guarded, so that evil people did not control them. That's why a strong fence was needed. Just like the body and soul in which they craved for, ceremonies and customs to be able to get closer to God Almighty (Lasminah, 2007).

Owing to Kustiah's understanding of the political situation, the improvement of his knowledge of war tactics, her experience of going into battle and military training, and her interest in reading ancient

manuscripts in Yogyakarta palace library, Kustiah was sent to Yogyakarta palace to join Bregada Nyai which was formed by Sultan Hamenku Buwana I. Coincidentally, Sultan Hamengku Buwana was also reviving the *wayang wong* – puppet – of Majapahit era (13th-16th century) as an effort to legitimize Yogyakarta palace as a continuation of Majapahit tradition (Soedarsono, 1997). Kustiah was very fortunate to be able to gain knowledge from books from Yogyakarta palace which re-wrote many puppet stories from Mahabharata and Ramayana. Those stories were adapted as they happened in the Javanese palace, such as the *wayang wong* play Gandawardeya. Many ancient texts contained power struggles between royal families since there were murderous intrigues between families of concubines in order to become king. There was also puppet script that told the story of a battle between two kingdoms equipped with war strategies to defeat the opponent. Sri Sultan also directly led the revitalization of the heritage dances of Bedhaya Semang and Lawung Ageng (Soedarsono, 1997). This dance has a very strong military feel in which the basic movements were taken from the movements of troops practicing spears and supported by dance music which combines *gamelan* with trumpets, drum strings and bass drums which are commonly used by drumbands for marching troops. Sri Sultan also directly led the arrangement of Wayang Wong which became a state ceremony to commemorate the Sultan's accession to the throne at Yogyakarta palace (Soedarsono, 1997). Kustiah was thought to have been an eyewitness to those major events and would have felt the atmosphere of Sultan's burning spirit of struggle. The influence of Yogyakarta palace environment which was not subject to colonialism shaped Kustiah's personality to become increasingly strong in her sense of nationalism. In the palace library, she met R. Sundoro, the crown prince of Sultan Hemengku Buwana I (Janti, 2018). They often read together and discussed the contents of the script, then ultimately fell in love each other and symbolically married. However, in the end they divorced because Kustiah returned to Serang to replace his father who died as war leader.

Excellent and strong Islamic religious education fosters awareness of basic human rights which require security, freedom and happiness in living life. If these basic needs are not met, the cause must be sought. At that time, the problem was caused by the colonialists who robbed the people's agricultural products plus the trap of high taxes to support the colonialists. According to Islam, this condition violates the word of Allah and must be eradicated. Therefore, Nyi Ageng Serang's soul burned with determination to expel the invaders until the end of her life. Many national fighters were from Islamic intellectuals, such as fighters of Aceh war and Java war. The originators of the Youth Pledge were also Islamic intellectuals who were well aware that colonialism and oppression were strongly opposed by any religion.

The fighting spirit of Nyi Ageng Serang's ancestors still rooted in her heart. It moved her whole body and soul to rise up to fight against colonialism. Her education and family environment, which was known to have patriotic spirit, shaped the personality of Nyi Ageng Serang. She was intelligent, lively, and had a sharp outlook on life, leading her to be highly aware about the condition of the people who were suffering and miserable due to the regulations made by the Company. Circumstances had required her conscience to think about finding the causes of why such condition happened. Since she was a teenager, Kustiah had a strong belief in the principle that colonialists who liked to torture, oppress and confiscate the crops of indigenous people must disappear from the archipelago. She thought that what they did was not in accordance with Islamic law that humans must love each other and be equal before Allah, so they should respect each other's rights and obligations. However, during the colonial era, indigenous people no longer had even the slightest right to live. Their souls could be torn away at any time if they fought for their rights. It is related to the Qur'an teachings about human relations which are summarized in 3 verses out of 7 verses as the followings:

Al-Isha verse 7 which explains that Allah calls on humans to do more good and respect each other. Al-Hujurat verse 10 which teaches us to be creatures who can maintain relationships and even make peace with others. Apart from that, it requires humans to not fight with each other as it will trigger divisions. Al-Hujurat verse 11 in which Allah forbids His people from degrading and criticizing fellow

humans because it will cause strife. In fact, people who do all of those negative things are called unjust. Therefore, based on her understanding of the holy verses, Kustiah dared to risk his life to defend his nation and expel the invaders.

3. Methods

The researchers implemented the transformation method proposed by Sapardi Joko Damono. The whole choreography was based on the story of Nyi Ageng Serang's struggle written by Putu Lasminah, in which the story was transformed to a choreographic concept, expression, stage settings, and harmonious musical composition. The things that must be considered when transferring history to a dance work based on the understanding of Djoko Damono's method are: selecting and choosing interesting parts to choreograph; eliminating political elements; interpreting the character of the main character; adapting the tastes of today's audience, such as stage artistic performances that use shadow play (Damono, 2012).

The choreography used *ziarah ragawi* method (Martono & Subawa, 2016) which always begins with improvised moves with closed eyes, relying more on the feeling of moving slowly according to one's heart, rather than moving because of a theme. After a while the improvisation exercises the moves start to include themes, such as move of expressing reading a book. The thick book is an icon of Qur'an and at the same time an ancient manuscript. Some forms of ancient manuscripts are in the form of sheets of paper and in the form of dry palm leaves like in Bali, which still exist today. Therefore, the processing properties of the book are explored which brings them closer to the original form of ancient manuscripts. The book can be pulled apart between the front cover and the back cover to become an elongated string of paper, so that it can be explored by the dancer.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Sanggit

Sanggit is highly essential in creating works of art, especially those that depict historical stories, *wayang* and others since the creativity in processing the manuscript will be visible in the *sanggit*. This is greatly influenced by the socio-cultural background of the creating artist as well as the subject matter and creativity. Even though it tells the same story, thanks to *sanggit*, the work will be different. *Sanggit* at Nyi Ageng Serang is firstly expressing a woman's character that was raised by a family environment in a strong Islamic religious education, being able to read the Qur'an and of course Javanese writing in books in Yogyakarta palace library. Starting from the ability to read, Kustiah was able to read ancient manuscripts which wrote heroic stories and war strategies. Thus, it is not surprising that later Nyi Ageng Serang became an expert in guerrilla warfare strategy.

In the second *sanggit*, the war scene is expressed in the form of a projected shadow of two dancers fighting from behind a white backdrop. These shadow images have layered meanings in which they can be expressions of the past and future as well as express imaginative things.

4.2. Identification of Artwork

Identification of the choreography created used the construction method from Jacuenline Smith (Jacqueline Smith, 1985) consisting of dance stimulus, determining the dance type, and presentation mode. During dance stimulus, the authors applied stimulus ideas based on the story of the history of Nyi Ageng Serang's struggle by highlighting the important and interesting part according to the choreographer. That part is why Nyi Ageng Serang was able to become a war strategist during the Diponegoro war in the colonial period.

Determining the dance type meant that the authors used the dramatic dance type which focuses on the most important fragments of events in the story of Nyi Ageng Serang and does not convey the complete

story. Fragments of the story are explored interpretively with innovative engineering and expressed with the power of dramatic dynamics. In presentation mode, the authors used symbolic mode because this choreography is based on Javanese dance which plays on philosophical and symbolic language. However, the symbols are expressed in an easily recognizable way read by connoisseurs. It does not use hidden or complicated symbols. The event symbolized is the war against the invaders in which it is carried out by two dancers through silhouettes projected onto a white cloth screen which also serves as a backdrop. The play of light on a screen using lamps and a projector with a video of the flames express Nyi Ageng Serang's never-ending fighting spirit against the invaders until the end of her life.

Struggle armed with religion, nationalism, especially loyalty to the teachings of Islamic religion which teaches that fellow human beings are equal before Allah, so they must love each other, respect each other. They are not allowed to oppress, torture, even kill others. In the colonial era, common people were oppressed, their wealth was extorted, and countless lives were lost to satisfy the colonialists' sense of power. The choreography carries Javanese dance nuance. It does not thoroughly develop Javanese dance motifs, but it only uses *ukel* movement techniques in which hand positions, raised legs, and body positions are in Javanese style.

4.3. Choreography of Nyi Ageng Serang Dance

The authors thoroughly sort Nyi Ageng Serang's story and select interesting parts to be the choreography. According to the author, the interesting parts are: Nyi Ageng Serang or Kustiah Wulaningsih had a strong Islamic religion belief since she was the descendant of Sunan Kaijaga and the daughter of Panembahan Notorojo, the warlord Prince Mangkubumi before Giyanti agreement. Thus, inside her body, she holds inner and outer strength as a human being with a true patriotic spirit. She strongly held her Islamic teachings that it was absolutely forbidden to oppress, torture others as well as confiscate others' belongings. During the colonial period, Kustiah saw with her own eyes about the reality. Poor people were tortured, oppressed, and confiscated from their crops and even killed arbitrarily. Her soul was in turmoil when she saw that condition. The suffering of the people required Kustiah to train for war with his father's soldiers with enthusiasm, so that she could immediately enter the battlefield against the Company and free his people from suffering. Kustiah Wulaningsih was actively enthusiastic about practicing soldierly sports and was trained directly by his father, such as horse riding, fighting techniques armed with *keris* (Javanese traditional weapon) and spears. It was also from her father she learned a lot about guerrilla warfare tactics. She was even sent to Yogyakarta palace to join Bregodo Nyai while practicing soldiering. Her knowledge of war tactics was further improved significantly from his hobby of reading books in Yogyakarta palace library. In the library, she met Sundoro, the crown prince of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I. Finally, they got married symbolically. However, Kustiah didn't want to have children as she still wanted to continue her fight on the battlefield. When her father died, Kustiah Wulaningsih returned to her village, Serang, to replace her father, leading the guerrilla war against invaders armed with machine guns.

Choreography	Code
	Dancers wear Javanese Islamic based on Islamic teaching because Nyi Ageng Serang is a descendant of Sunan Kalijaga who adhered to his religion.



The dancers are expressing a religious Nyi Ageng Serang who love reading.



The dancers express Nyi Ageng Serang leaving *keraton* to replace her died father to lead war in Serang.



The dancers express Nyi Ageng Serang leaving *keraton* to replace her died father to lead war in Serang.



The dancers express Nyi Ageng Serang organizing guerrilla war strategy behind Taro leaves and a moment when she died in the ending.



The dancers express Nyi Ageng Serang organizing guerrilla war strategy behind Taro leaves and a moment when she died in the ending.

The parts of the story mentioned in the previous, which will be transformed into the choreography, express Kustiah's spiritual journey and knowledge of war tactics from books she read in Yogyakarta palace library. At that time, books were ancient manuscripts written in Javanese script, written by the masters of their time. Those ancient manuscripts in Javanese script still exist today in the palace library.

5. Conclusion

The heroine Nyi Ageng Serang aroused a sense of admiration for researchers. During the difficult times around 1752-1828, a period of cruel colonialism and restrictions on education for women she did a lot of incredible actions. In Serang village, Purwodadi, Central Java, a girl named Kustiah Wulaningsih Retno Edi was born and grew up in a family circle of warriors who were well educated based on Islamic teachings. Kustiah appeared to surprise many people including the crown prince Sultan Hamengku Buwana I and Prince Diponegoro. When the Java war broke out, 70-year-old Kustiah was appointed as war advisor or strategic organizer of guerrilla warfare by Prince Diponegoro. It was a very extraordinary achievement for a woman coming from the village. Nyi Ageng Serang's abilities were obtained from a long struggle, starting from childhood when she received Islamic religious education from religious experts in Central Java, then as a teenager she took part in war training with Panembahan Notoprojo's father. Even, she went onto the battlefield in Central Java until the Giyanti agreement was formed. In the quiet period, Nyi Ageng Serang joined Bregada Nyai which was formed by Sultan Hamengku Buwana I. While at Yogyakarta palace, most of her time was spent reading ancient manuscript books from the palace collection.

According to authors, it was while at the palace that Nyi Ageng Serang's intellectual development developed and she became increasingly critical of colonial rule, in addition to being in the circle of Sultan Hamengku Buwana I who had the warrior spirit of her father's friend in founding Yogyakarta palace. She was also close to Prince Diponegoro and the people who did not like colonialists. Nyi Ageng Serang could prove that women were able to play a direct role in the nation's struggle based on love spirit for country and religion at the same time.

In accordance with the problems of the study, this research has succeeded in uncovering the secret of Nyi Ageng Serang's ability to become a war strategist thanks to her seriousness in war training, love for the nation, and an understanding of Islamic law. Religion guided every of her step until she finished the war and out from the battlefield in good condition. The Qur'an led her from her childhood until the end of her life. Even though her soul had left her body, her hands still held the holy book tightly.

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