

## The Paradoxical and Cultural Value Relativity Representation of The Figures of Indie Film "Tanda Tanya (?)"

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**Abstract :** Film as a media to communicate message is built upon the language structure that consists of symbols or signs. It revolves around the problems in the film's text; how is the film's text constructed, encoded, received, and interpreted; how the film's text formulated by the creator and how the film's text is interpreted by the audience. The creator's freedom and creativity on content selection are considered potentially result in a cultural values conflict in our society. Accordingly, the study was conducted to learn more about relativity within the narrative signification of a film by the audience, as well as the signification over the representation of the characters in the film with reference to the paradoxical and cultural values relativity that carried in the narrative of the film. The case study of film's text interpretation was conducted through an indie movie "Tanda Tanya (?)" as the object of the research. This research is a qualitative research with the cultural studies approach by means of hermeneutic phenomenological interdisciplinary research method with descriptive-interpretative techniques. A group of spectators objected on the narrative message of the film "Tanda Tanya (?)" indicates the interpretation impossibility of the absolute truth of the text. In general, the paradoxical and relativity of cultural values in the film are related to the dramatic structure within the narrative of the film which presented by key figures. Relativism and paradoxical are related to each other; cultural relativity, individual relativity, and the spatial and temporal relativity.

**Keywords:** *signification, individual, relativity, cultural values*

### 1. Background

The Indie film is growing and developing rapidly nowadays, along with all the problems that surround it. For some groups, the growth of this type of film is considered positive, for in addition to being a medium of expression for the creators it also provides some space and opportunity to be able to bring about an relatively inexpensive film production by themselves. However, the freedom and experimentation in the contents selection are considered potentially result in a conflict of cultural values in our society on the other hand. The "Tanda Tanya (?)" indie film which directed by Hanung Bramantyo, was promoted the narrative of plurality. The cultural background, religion, and social level disparity, as well as the individual interest of the characters involved. The values selection in the form of ideas and behavior of these figures had taken them to some social issues such as conflicts and inter-ethnic resentment, and religious radicalism. Notwithstanding that the film was deemed to be a criticism of the issue of religious intolerance in Indonesia and evoked protests from certain groups, it had enlisted a good reception in some countries such as Singapore, Australia and Canada. Then why protest over the narrative of the film emerged, and what the messages content in its dramatic narrative structure which represented by the characters involved? Possibly, the significance on the film narrative might be

different on society and individuals with different cultural values. In assessing and interpreting a film was not just limited to the production phase; in which the film is constructed by a creator, but also the phase consumption in which the viewers interpret the film's text.

## 2. Cultural Values

In the normative definition, culture connotes a rule or a way of life that established the behavioral patterns and concrete actions; which in the role values system was not referring to the behavior but more inclined to the realm of abstract ideas. In the psychological definition, it tend to emphasize the role of culture as the troubleshooting tools that allow people to communicate, to learn, or to meet their material or emotional needs. While in the genetic definition, it highlights more the origins of how culture can survive; culture born from the humans interaction and survive for it transmitted from one generation to the next (Kroeber and Kluckholm in Sutrisno: 2005). Culture became core of the civilization. According to Neo-Marxisme, there are close connection between cultural, individual and social structure. That connection is a culture functionalism as a paradigm of human thinking. Culture became a manifestation of the creative power of human activity as individuals as well as a group. Furthermore, according to Kusumohadimidjojo (2009), culture is a dialectical process that is born from the complexion of cerebration, spirit, and conscience that were manifested as a complexion of human behavior and human effort in the form of materialization (*things*); especially as the ideas which adopted, implemented, and passed through the learning process and adapted in a common life (*instiutalization*).

Value or dignity is a quality of a thing that can make it be preferable, desirable, useful, or it can be the object of interest. Value is more related to the issues of: motive (likes / dislikes); ethics (good / bad); aesthetics (beautiful / ugly) rather than to the logic issues (true / false). Once a value had accepted by the mainstream of the society, it would be a part of the mainstream of the norms-system; and even pushed in to the marginal groups. The norms-system in a certain society will be binding, it becomes imperative and charged with sanctions for any members of the group (Kusumohadimidjojo: 2009).

Values has the basic elements of the objective which are related to the benefits (*utility*) and interest (*importance*) as well as the basic elements of subjective which are related to the judgment or interpretation (*estimation*) and necessity (*needs*). In the cultural context, the selection of a good value is absolutely necessary; either it was based on consideration of the individual as an intrinsic value, or due to the influence and encouragement from the outside environment as an extrinsic value, as well as the permanent productive values such as economic value (Soelaeman: 2010). Values is deemed valuable by persons or groups; and became a reference or act as well as a way of life. Values was internalized as the realm of the importance of life; discourse and lived in the realm of symbols by means of culture (Sutrisno: 2005).

## 3. Paradox and Cultural Relativity

The value-system is stand between the composite of individual norms-system and the composite of society norms-system. The composite of individual norms-system was stand and confront with the society norms-system at the same time. The value-system and the composite of norms-system are prone to both changes that caused by dynamics along with its supporting internal energy as well as by the cultural diffusion and acculturation. This can occur inasmuch as values-system

and norms-system was formed by the parameters that became the benchmark and encouraged the endorsers to choose which value is appropriate for them. The value-system and the composite of norms-system changes were analogous with the process of cultural change. There is no single society and culture that static and absolute; however there are groups of people that still following a culture that tends to stagnate due to the application of the parameters which is nearly absolute. That absoluteness occurred due to: (a) the believe and faith that did not give the leeway to the argument, such as the claim of truth in every religion; (b) the pattern of one arguments that rejected the other argument, as happened in ideology.

Relativity was stand in a culture due to a historical process that put all instances side by side, mingled, and interplayed; even cut and repelled one another in the lives of individuals in the community. Cultural relativity was concern of inequality in the temporal and spatial dimensions; in which something that applies in a certain time/place did not or might not be valid in other time/place, vice versa. Relativism was concern of the individual consciousness and collective consciousness (the community). Furthermore, Archie Bahm - in Kusumohadimidjojo (2009) - suggested that cultural relativity was distinguished by personal (individual) and temporal relativities: (a) the cultural relativity; proponents of different cultures, accepting what were good or bad, right or wrong, real or fake – including the selection of the more sophisticated values or the simple one – in different ways (b) individual relativity; in many perceptive experiences of their life every person is unique. No matter how permissive they might be to the normative pressure of the mainstream of their society, there was still a confidential personal room for any other subjects (individuals). (c) temporal relativity; the dynamics and changes in a culture, displayed differences in human's the way of thinking and behavior over time.

In the same spatial and temporal context various values also could overlap in every society. Not just the value that unites social coherency, but also the tradition with absolute inconsistency value-system. The more traditional one society was, the more natural the individual's learning process to be engaged in the culture of their communities; and the space of the individual's choice was getting narrow simultaneously. In more developed societies, the learning process was institutionalized in a variety of educational programs that practically did not involve genealogical. Those learning processes were fully-loaded with relativity. Space relativity tends to be limited by the globalization process. The process that was in accordance with the principle of universality; this process was came off with global instinct to rely on the various standards that would be applied to all people in all over place, and at all times. The standards absoluteness that promoted by globalization had urged the relativity of all local matters toward universality; it reduces the individual uniqueness as a subject. Globality on one hand; spatial and temporal uniqueness of the culture on the other hand; were result in the relative and not absolute display of the culture. Furthermore, paradoxes made a conflict-ridden culture; globality against diversity, relativism against absolutism.

Jacques Derrida assumed that everything was passed away and relied on the locality - a particular community, there is no universality but only the fragments. He saw reality as a text (Baha Lajar in Sutrisno: 2005). He was emphasized on the diversity of the cerebation and the approach to the existing text. Every human has a freedom to explore the reality or the text that

will draw toward the diversity of meanings (*polysemy*). That there is a wide range of meanings in reality that could be generated by different reading or interpretation. The same reality or text could be read differently by another person or another party and has different meaning as well. This very idea of Derrida became the basis of how to escape from a way of thinking that assumes that the absolute truth was stand only on one particular group. In turn, the openness to the different meanings will formalized a single individual to be more prepared and more open to accept other human beings - other communities with different meanings. They are better prepared to celebrate the diversity or plurality. This was in line with the cultural relativism.

#### 4. Film as a Text

The contemporary Indonesian society: pluralistic, spreads, and not easily tied in various political, social, and cultural issues (Kitley in Van Heeren: 2012). The political and democratization changes of Indonesian cinema in the new film technology had brought out a discourse that outfaced the concept of cinema, the idea of a stable cultural meanings coherency that associated with the uniqueness of a particular national culture. In the current transnational world, national identity changed or replaced by an excessive national identity that based on social, politics, or religion sentiment (Adam Knee in Van Heeren, 2012). A discourse that highlighted the local identity, the local and global dialectic with a focus on local production and global demand that is constantly changing is increasingly developed at the same time. In localism, the process of transnationalization and de-territorialization consciousness did not always have to be with a new and shared imagination of transnational cultural identity, but also could be through hybridized construction. The locality reappearance could be seen as the construction of resistance and struggle for freedom. How then discourse was delivered?

A message in media - in whatever shape it took - was always built upon the language structure that consists of symbols or signs. All the forms of sign's activities was regulated and conditioned by the organization and structure of the language. Media - as a medium of representation – was indicated the entire system in which the text was produced, selected and responded. A text would present the semiotic value, meaning and ideology in it. Media produced social-identity-and-cultural-values-based relations between groups. The media of a text is the institutional support material for the text itself. Media is used as an abbreviation for the mass media is the broad-deployment text media that consisting of; printing, television, film, radio, internet, as well as journalism and advertisement in its various forms in particular. The discourse on media is including a set of techniques and modes of the designation system which attempt to decimate the media self-interest in delivering world-news. These techniques and modes are including the claims to perceive the feelings or attitudes of viewers on a particular issue.

According to Chris Barker (2009: 419), a text is everything that configures meaning by means of significance. Text is the combination of signs. The elements a film are signs of paradigmatic choice; and a film structure is the combination of signs (text) that configures the syntagm combination. Film, fashion, television programs, sporting events, and other pop stars could be read as a text. The standard to measure whether the elements of narrative and cinematic in a film that produced by filmmakers is adequate or not, is depending on the audience. The language of

film – in the form of audio-visual combination; motion and verbal was communicated to the audience in the expectation to be well received, however it is highly depend upon the audience's mental experience, cultural background, and knowledge and understanding on the narrative and cinematic elements of the film. Film as an analogous cultural text to a language (*linguistic*), that consisting of signs, the readable system of signs and meanings. At the phase of consumption - when the readers enjoying and conceiving the subtitles - the active and productive participation of its readers are required. Every text was understood differently by different groups and at different times.

The institutions of filmmakers were including the director, as the executant of the text selection and production and the spectators as the subject who responds and interprets the text on the signification process of on in the consumption phase of the film. In the production process, an indie film did not follow the mainstream of film production process, the film was not produced and distributed by the large studios. In the reform period, the economic, social, and political condition was provided an opportunity for the creators to determining how to produce and distribute films for consumption aside from the oppression of the dominant force. The director and the filmmaker institution have their own aesthetic standard for the narrative-style as well as the message visualization. There was a negotiation between the audience and the subtitles occurred in this phase of consumption; and this could be analyzed on different levels; to wit the audience, the text, and the institutions that constructed the text. In the paradigm of the cultural of study, to interpret the film was not only determined by the phase of the production but also by the consumption phase (Storey: 2008).

## 5. Methodology

The research conducted is the qualitative research by means of the cultural studies approach through the hermeneutic phenomenological interdisciplinary research method by means of descriptive-interpretative techniques. The research was conducted through the following analysis stage; (a) Bracketing (*epoch*), reading the text (*memoing*); reading the whole text of the film, making some marginal notes, formalizing the initial code, (b) *Horizontalization*; describing data into the code and theme of the film; describe personal experience, describing the essence of that phenomenon, (c) Clustering meaning, classifying the data into the code of the film's dramatic structure that consisting of staging or phase and theme of the movie; developing the important statements, grouping them into the units of meaning, (d) Interpreting the data; developing a textural description, developing an essence, (e) Describing the essence of the phenomenon, integrating the theme into a narrative description (Creswell: 2014).

## 6. The Object of Research

The object of research is an indie category film entitled "Tanda Tanya (?)" The film was directed by Hanung Bramantyo, and first launched on April 7, 2011; produced by Mahaka Pictures and Kitchen Film Indonesia. Production information: (a) Producer: Hanung Bramantyo and Celerina Judisari, (b) Executive Producer: Erick Thohir, (c) Line Producer: Talita Amilia, (d) Script

Writer: Titien Wattimena, (e) Cameraman: Yadi Sugandi, (f) Editor: Cesa David Lukmansyah, (g) Casting Director: Zaskia Adya Mecca, (h) Art Director: Fauzi, (i) Music Director: Tya Subiyakto Satrio, (j) Soundman: Satrio Boediono and Shaft Daultsyah, (k ) Makeup Stylist and Wardrobe: Retno Ratih Damayanti, (l) Length: 101 minutes. Starring: (a) Reza Rahadian as Soleh, (b) Revalina S. Temat as Menuk, (c) Rio Dewanto as Ping Hen a.k.a Hendra, (d) Agus Kuncoro as Surya, (e) Endhita as Rika, (f) Henky Solaiman as Kat Tan Sun. Genre: drama with the theme of the background differences on cultural, religious, and socio-economic level of the characters.

## **6.1 Analysis and Findings**

### **6.1.1 The Dramatic Structure, Plot, and Storyline**

This film was promoted the narrative on plurality. It is to wit the differences in cultural, religious, social level background, as well as the self-interest of the characters involved in it. The values selection that in the form of ideas and behavior of these figures was drew them into the social problems; such as conflicts and inter-ethnic resentment, as well as the religious radicalism. The set was took place at Semarang, Central Java in the year of 2010.



A plot is the series of events that presented and displayed the causalities between events presented. The plot of the movie "Tanda Tanya (?)" was speaking in a linear pattern, with the narrative structure that consisting of a beginning, middle, and end, or closure; and the chronological dramatic structure. The dramatic structure of this film was consisting of: Exposition; introducing figures, showing the relationship and linkages between them and put them in a time and place; Complications; in which the conflict were started and grown more clearly, more intensive and more meaningful; Climax; when the complications part have reached the maximum peak tension, the two hostile parties will confront in one physical or emotional act; Resolution; a state of balance and harmony that subsequent to the conflict resolution at climax (Pratista: 2008).




Physically, a film has a structure that consisting of a shot, scenes, and sequence. Sequence is a large segment that shows the chains of events as a whole. Generally, one sequence is comprised of several interconnected scenes. One sequence usually grouped by a period (of time), location, or one long action chain. The dramatic structure of this film is consisting of: (1) The phase of exposition; (2) The phase of complications; (3) The phase of climax; and (3) The phase of resolution.

### **6.1.2 The Representation of Figures**




**Table 1 : The Representation of the Figures and The Value Selection**

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Ethnical, Religious, Occupation, and Social Background; and Norms</b>	<b>The Values Selection</b>
 Menuk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Javanese</li> <li>- Moslem</li> <li>- An employee at Tan Kat Sun's restaurant</li> <li>- The wife of Soleh, who had a close relationship with Ping Hen (the son of Tan Kat Sun) whose belief was dissimilar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The breadwinner of the family; men should act as the breadwinner in the norms of Islam</li> <li>- Decided not to be subordinated to men, due to the circumstances</li> <li>- Choose to be the wife of Soleh due to the similar conviction</li> </ul>
 Soleh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Javanese</li> <li>- Moslem</li> <li>- Encounter difficulty in getting a job (before became the member of Banser NU)</li> <li>- The husband of Menuk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Totally obedient to his religion</li> <li>- Cynical toward the circumstances, antipathy toward Chinese, and radical – including his rivalry with Ping Hen</li> <li>- Feels helpless as a husband, as a father; and to his sister who lived with his family</li> <li>- Choosing a job as a member of Banser NU – which in some cases was attempt to dispel the radical image of the Moslems</li> <li>- Died while trying to keep the bomb from the church - allegedly by radical religious groups - to rescue Christians who were celebrating the feast of Christmas</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chinese – the minority ethnic that have the economics dominant power</li> <li>- Confucian</li> <li>- The owner of the restaurant where Menuk works in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has a high tolerance toward religious and social life; (a) separate cookware and tableware for the food that will be consumed by Muslims and not Muslims, (b), provides the leniency for his employees to perform religious rituals at work</li> <li>- Have the vision and the good demeanor, that running a business is not just the pursuit of financial gain; provides a longer vacation for his Moslem employees for them to celebrate Eid</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chinese</li> <li>- Proceeding in finding the religious beliefs, followed Confucianism initially before finally converting to Islam</li> <li>- The son of Tan Kat Sun – the owner of the restaurant</li> <li>- Once had a close relationship with Menuk whose belief was dissimilar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the process of finding a life choice (egoism); in continuing his father's business and in the choice of religious beliefs</li> <li>- Has a different business vision than his father</li> <li>- Violent and frontal behavior without the depth calculations - including the feud with Soleh</li> <li>- Choose Islam as a conviction and running the business in accordance with the teachings of Islam</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Javanese</li> <li>- In the process of changing beliefs of Islam to Catholicism</li> <li>- Running the family business: book store/library that stores references on multi-cultural and multi-religious</li> <li>- A widow; for she was rejected her polygamist husband (a moslem)</li> <li>- Has a close relationship with Surya</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing beliefs of Islam to Catholicism due to her disappointment toward her ex-husband. Placing Allah as the same Essence despite different religious affiliations</li> <li>- Encouraging her only son to keep adheres Islam</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Javanese</li> <li>- Moslem</li> <li>- A supernumerary who should be ready to play any role</li> <li>- Has a close relationship with Rika and her only son</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attempting to fulfill his religious beliefs well</li> <li>- His occupation as an actor led him to the options that cannot be avoided - including playing roles as Prophet Isa (Jesus Christ) and Santa Claus. Choice that made him feels guilty.</li> <li>- Selection of work at the urging of the economic needs and establish a good relationship with Rika and the people around him</li> </ul>
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Surya

### 6.1.3 Findings

The indie film "Tanda Tanya (?)" has an aesthetic value and originality that contained in the values of modernity based on the production phase. In the production process, this indie film did not follow the mainstream of the production process, it did not produced and distributed by the large studios. The economic, social, and political condition in the reform period provides an opportunity for the creators to determine how to produce and distribute films for consumption without the suppression of the dominant force. The institutions of filmmakers - including the director - have their own aesthetical standard in the style of expression as well as message visualization. In the consumption phase over the object of this study the aesthetical, moral, and postmodernity values were could be found. For the post-modernity values that were refused the grand narrative on the hegemony of the majority towards the smaller groups. The values of postmodernity were represented in the main characters of the film.

The main characters (Menuk, Soleh, kat Tan Sun, Heng Pin, Rika, and Surya) in the object of study are individuals who stand on community social systems and different cultural system, although they were on the same spatial and temporal dimensions. The differences in the values-system and the composite of norms-system of a complex system of each character were depend upon ethnic, religion, and occupation background. The values of postmodernity that were rejected the grand narratives on the hegemony of the majority towards smaller groups were found. The Moslem group that became the dominant group in this film was positioned equivalently therewith the recognition of small groups such as Confucianism or Catholicism. Sun Tan Kat figures who were ethnically Chinese and Confucians became the representation of minority groups as well as a representation of the economics dominant groups. The attitude of this figure toward Moslem who became the customers his restaurant represented the recognition and appreciation of differences which are the values of postmodernity. The generational gap was provided chance and space for changes in traditional values among generations, Kat Sun Tan figures represented the older generation as well as the character Ping Hen a.k.a. Hendra that

represented generations now, have a different perspective and vision toward problems and continue running their family business.

The paradoxical and cultural relativity which refers to a choice that is not absolute and the overlapping values in spatial and temporal context could be seen at; the minorities under the certain conditions who became the dominant group in a particular field and on the contrary the dominant group - in terms of population - would be a marginal group in the economic field. The character of Menuk which represented the dominant group - as a Muslim in the region of Central Java, and marginalized groups at once by being a waiter in a restaurant owned by Tan Kat Sun. Menuk as a wife of Soleh, that in the Islamic traditional values of was often being the subordinated of men became the backbone of the family. While the figure of Soleh as a husband or head of the family in the Islamic traditional values was obliged to be the breadwinner, was even more submissive to the problems of his family. Soleh's characteristic and behavior that were tend radical even made him died because the act of those radicals themselves. The issues that were affecting Soleh and Menuk are those that more associated with the economic and moral values of traditional societies.

In the values of postmodernity there are radical relativity values included; in which values and truth were became the individual products as well as the selection of the paradoxical value that triggered internal and social conflict. The character of Rika was represented the value of the radical relativity and the paradox. As a Moslem woman, she decided to learn Catholicism by herself, but on the other hand she was encouraged her only son to deepen the knowledge of Islam. Rika's family was acknowledged and appreciated the diversity. The character of Hen Ping was represented the selection of not-absolute value in running the business and selection of the religion. The inner struggles that were happen to the character of Surya - which aspires to become a great actor – he was always talking about idealism and moral. Due to the financial inability, idealism and moral values had become a paradox, this character was perforce to accept any role accordingly, including playing the Prophet Isa (Jesus Christ) or portray Santa Claus in a church activity whilst he was a Moslem and frequently stay overnight in the mosque. The traditional Islamic society point of view was rejected a Muslim to plays a role as Jesus Christ in the church, for that could be mean recognizing Jesus Christ in the viewpoint of the Church / Christian.

## **7. Conclusion**

The Postmodernity values were represented in the film of "Tanda Tanya (?)". Those values are related to the production phase - where the film as a text was constructed; and the consumption phase -where the film was watched and interpreted by the audience. Film as a text is the films filmmakers institution's paradigmatic choice of elements and structure in conveying the narrative message. The filmmaker institutions have their own aesthetical standard in the expression-style as well as the message visualization. The subtitle recitation by the audience was depending upon their mental experience, cultural background, knowledge and understanding on the narrative and cinematic elements of the film. The objections from a group of spectators against narrative message of the film of "Tanda Tanya (?)" were indicating the impossibility of absolute truth

interpretation toward the text. The film's text were comprehended differently by the different groups and at different times so that it would produce a different meaning. In the interpretation of the film's text, an active and productive participation of the audience were required, which in turn makes all the stakeholders are better prepared to celebrate the diversity and plurality.

The value-system and the composite of individual norms-system were in contact with the values-system and the composite of society norms-system. The value-system and the composite of norms-system were easily changed due to the relativity of the parameter of value option by individuals in society. Relativism and paradoxical in the movie "Tanda Tanya (?)" as the object of study were generally related to the dramatic structure of the film narrative represented by key figures in the film. Generally, the relativism and the paradoxical were include: (a) the cultural relativity, the main character has the different cultural background (ethnic, conviction, job) so as different in selecting values parameter as well; (b) the individual relativity, although those figures were came from the same cultural background they might differ in the terms of decision-making and behavior. That every individual is unique and that there are personal space which left unknown for other individuals; (c) the spatial and temporal relativity, the diversity of the way of thinking and behavior at each age. It was represented by the characters Kat Tan Ping Sun and Hen, both were representing the different generations with the different mindset and behavior in the same cultural space. The cultural values overlapping in the same context of the spatial and temporal in that relativity was raises the paradox that triggered the conflict as represented by the characters in the dramatic structure of the film that became the object of study.

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