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Archiving local culture through transnational popular culture research

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ABSTRACT: Popular Culture works have been seen as products that are not worthy for academic research. A factor for this is that the research into everyday life's cultures from the low to the middle class have not been of interest to academics. Through the lens of Cultural Hybridity and Phenomena perspectives for the analysis of the Popular Culture products on *punklung*, Jamaican reggae, MacDonald's rice porridge, TikTok, and Vaseline hand body lotion, this article shares a research result that the popularity is maintained by mixing local-global and irrespectively global-local elements. In this way, Popular Culture products can continue to be transnational, while at the same time archiving local culture.

1 TRANSNATIONAL POPULAR CULTURE

Popular Culture research is varied. Not only can there be talk of popular box office movies, music, or celebrities, but there is also talk of trendy clothes or makeup advertisements, famous food, or whatever else is being phenomenal in particular social media apps. Most of the time, a cultural product is regarded as popular due to the mass audience or consumers enjoying the product. The mass criterion is usually the key to popularity because having products available in mass means easy access to the creation and having it cheap enough to buy. After all, popular cultural objects are texts and practices of the working classes as well as texts and practices produced and consumed on a mass scale. Thus, they are usually mass-marketed products that many people use (Schuck, 2020).

The United States of America has been known to produce numerous kinds of popular culture. One original reasons is that US television shows have been aired throughout the rest of the world since the 1920s. Furthermore, due to the coming of the internet nowadays, these shows are even more popular with their reproduction or promotion through live YouTube channels, indicating that most popular culture products originate from the USA still. The Americas Got Talent show is one form of popular culture that has globalized worldwide due to its franchise for British, Australian, Indonesian, and many other countries' Got Talents. However, with the entrance of Western popular culture in its development to the East, the South Korean culture is recently trending, enabling the entrance of the Eastern culture to the USA, Indonesia, and other parts of the world.

An article on the Jamaican Rastafarian movement is another example of how transnational and influential a popular culture product could become. As a movement, it made use of reggae music to popularize its contemporary socio-religious Black Messiah movement. Only some people have been aware that within the last three decades, the "global penetration of the pop music" (Savishinsky, 1994, p. 260) was made successful through the mass-produced audio and video cassette recording industries of reggae music, which later developed into live shows on the television and in the form of live-streams on YouTube. Initially, entertaining lower-class neighborhoods of the Caribbean islands, the upbeat rhythm of the reggae music has interested young generations to follow the loose and freestyle of the colorfully clad Bob Marley with his authentic solid music. In Zimbabwe, it was reported that young fans of Bob Marley had "began sporting dreadlocks, smoking ganja, speaking Iyoric and wearing Rasta colors" (Savishinsky, 1994, p. 268). Therefore, transnational popular culture could start researching a global product that locals enjoy, or it could be the other way round, i.e., an originally local cultural product that becomes a global culture.

2 LOCAL-GLOBAL, GLOBAL-LOCAL PHENOMENON

Recently, in Indonesia, there is a local popular culture that may become a globally acclaimed phenomenon. Almost like reggae, the phenomenon is a musical performance that chooses to play at the corner of traffic lights. The location selected has been understood by some passersby as a form of protest to the Covid-19 condition, which limited people to be entertained in a big field for the massive crowd. However, other individuals see that the phenomenon is one way to appreciate an attempt to elevate a local culture into a global culture.

The musical instrument used in the performance is a traditional instrument known as an *angklung*. If an *angklung* set, made from bamboo, is usually played with a traditional percussion known as *kendhang* by drumming on it with the palm of someone's hands, this musical set of *angklung* is paired with a western drum and cymbals. Alongside it is a xylophone or *kulintang*-like instrument, which is also made from bamboo. One great instrument is a homemade 25-liter empty bucket covered with cow's hide, which functions as the bass drum. Some people call the people playing *Calung Malioboro*; meanwhile, *Punklung* players are the people who are dressed up like punks (Dukut & Nugroho, 2021). Though only playing for a few seconds, depending on how long the red traffic light is on until it turns into green, it is obvious that it has attracted car and motor vehicle drivers to give their attention and smile for the quick one-stoplight entertainment. Interestingly, this phenomenon is found in cities on Java Island. With some of the performances uploaded to YouTube, it will likely be a local turned into a global popular culture.

Another phenomenon enjoyed by the masses during the Covid-19 condition, which has impacted society to work mostly at home, is the innovation of TikTok in social media. TikTok is a video platform application from China launched in 2016 (Yu, 2019). It allows a user to upload a 15–60 second video showing the user doing something with her/his current hobby. The hobby could be cooking something, singing a favorite song, making popular dance moves, and many more. Ever since March 2020, Indonesian TikTok users have increased by 20 percent (Massie, 2020). When users upload their TikTok video, they are considered successful when followed by other TikTok users. Although originating from China, a 16-year-old girl named Charli D'Amelio has been making choreographies and viral songs since June 2019; she managed to be successfully followed by 90.2 million followers in a year (Leskin & Haasch, 2020). It is proven that a local culture can eventually become a global popular culture indeed.

Global–local culture is evident in the US MacDonald's burger, which has been transnationalized in many countries. Starting with its branches in international airports, it quickly makes its way to building up MacDonald's restaurants in many cities worldwide. The popularity of the restaurant's menu, however, experiences a transformation. For example, in attracting locals to consume a McDonald's product continually, the franchise owners do not only sell the usual kind of menu found in the USA, but they also include some local menus which are packaged following the McDonald tradition. For example, with some Asians being more comfortable with rice than bread as their carbohydrate source, some Indonesian MacDonald restaurants provide rice porridge or rice rather than the usual bun, sausage, and omelette. Indeed, popular culture products do find ways to keep themselves continually popular.

3 METHODS

Most people take popular culture products for granted. Because it is something they deal with in their everyday lives, they never thought it could be valuable data for research. Using my popular culture class to make my students realize the rich data are in front of them, I encourage them to archive their local culture to show how popular culture is continually developing its transnationality.

As a process, my students are initially given an understanding of the definition and characteristics of popular culture. After this, they are given readings to study and determine why they point to a popular culture product. Next, they are asked to observe their surroundings and find a popular culture product to discuss in class. As a final exercise, after receiving input on what is right or

wrong with the local popular culture, which can employ cultural hybridity and phenomena theory to support their explanation, they write it up as an academic paper.

In one class term, there are around thirty students. However, only two things will be discussed for this article because their class academic paper was then developed into their undergraduate thesis. One is about the TikTok phenomena that originated from China. The other is about the popularity of Vaseline hand body cream, which originated from the USA and became a favorite for Indonesians due to its whitening formula. As the major sponsor for their undergraduate thesis, I work closely with them to support my bigger research on popular culture, which adopts the cultural hybridity and phenomenon perspectives. The results of their study are discussed here.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *TikTok phenomenon*

Catharina Maria Nora Praviana is a student that became interested in researching TikTok phenomena. In addition to informing that TikTok has been popularly watched and used by many Indonesians since 2017, she highlighted the condition that TikTok not only helped users archive personal videos, but it also made users narcissist in a positive way (Praviana, 2021). As a popular culture, TikTok manages to fulfil the criteria of (1) creating a sense of pleasure for the users, (2) being easy to obtain because it is mass-produced, (3) having a low price, (4) manipulating in promoting itself, (5) creating a global-local lifestyle, (6) reflecting people's daily life, (7) reflecting a specific phenomenon, (8) temporariness, (9) practicality, (10) having a profit-making aim (Dukut, 2020). In providing continual popularity, Praviana (2021) also finds that Indonesian users used hybrid cultural elements in their TikTok uploads. One of those is the selfie uploading batik apparels, such as trousers, culotte, cardigan, sweaters, jumpsuits, and the already conventional long dress or skirt. Another form of cultural hybridity is how Erica Banks sang Buss It with a remix of Sundanese musical instruments. It is similar to the research above on mixing eastern and western musical instruments for *Punklung* music, which I did with a junior lecturer, who is under my auspices.

In seeing narcissist as a positive value for TikTok users, Praviana (2021) considers that it not only entertains but also elevates self-confidence and positive interaction among other TikTok users. This is a positive fact as it increases the users' immune system to make them healthier during Covid-19 conditions. This narcissist behavior is not a traditional Indonesian culture that was once known to be shy in expressing oneself and usually makes Indonesians have a low profile. With the entrance of TikTok, however, Praviana also finds that young people now have better self-esteem themselves. This is the reason why Indonesian TikTok users are increasing in number day by day.

4.2 *Vaseline hand body whitening and tanning*

Fei Bheola Putri Haryan's (2021) research compared two Indonesian Vaseline hand body advertisements and two USA Vaseline hand body advertisements. By using Roland Barthes' semiotics, she found that Indonesian advertisements have also used cultural hybridity elements to popularize Vaseline hand body advertisements among female consumers. Being a product originating from the USA, there has been the same branding in the font and colors used for the product name Vaseline. The apparels used by the models in the advertisement were also deliberately maintained in the navy blue or light blue color that Vaseline carries worldwide for its products. The model, however, is seemingly made local with Indonesian models who can be wearing a hijab and the other not. Both models, however, strive for the global Eastern beauty from Japan, South Korea, and the old-time Dutch colonialized time, as well as experienced by Javanese princesses in Indonesia, whereby the white complexion becomes the criteria for a standardized beauty. This is why the advertisements often contain texts or visuals that suggest how important are the elements of whitening someone's skin.

By contrast, however, in the USA, the standard of beauty has developed from white porcelain beauty into a tanned beauty. Due to multicultural ethnic values and the four weather seasons

experienced in the USA, the white porcelain beauty has been regarded as a sign of paleness or illness. Tanned beauty is now considered sexier because it entails that women are more healthy-looking by showing how much more time a person can be doing sports under the sun. This becomes the reason why tanning salons are popular in the USA, in addition to a hand body lotion that would give a tanning tone to their skin.

5 CONCLUSION

Some kinds of research can be discussed to show how popular culture products can be researched academically. However, it could not become an interesting academic finding if there is no opportunity to train a junior lecturer and some students on how to use the criteria of popular culture with perspectives of cultural hybridity and phenomena for the analysis. As shown in the article, a talk about *Punklung*, Jamaican reggae, MacDonald's rice porridge, TikTok, and Vaseline hand body lotion are ways to show that possibility.

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